BIRDS I HAVE KNOWN

Arthur H. Beavan

814

BOOKSELLER. J. [illegible]NES, STATIONER.

N [illegible]H.

BOOKSELLER.
J. B. DAWES,
LENDING
LIBRARY
NEATH.
STATIONER.

57-cast 3/9

BIRDS I HAVE KNOWN

For all Lovers of Natural History.

Quiet Hours with Nature.
By Mrs. BRIGHTWEN.
Fully Illustrated. Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

Nature's Story of the Year.
By CHARLES A. WITCHELL.
Fully Illustrated. Crown 8vo, cloth, 5s.

THE "BRIGHTWEN" SERIES.
Illustrated. Crown 8vo, Cloth, 2s.

1. Wild Nature Won by Kindness.
2. More about Wild Nature.
3. Inmates of My House and Garden.
4. Glimpses into Plant Life: An Easy Guide to the Study of Botany.
By Mrs. BRIGHTWEN.
5. In Birdland with Field-Glass and Camera.
By OLIVER G. PIKE.
6. Bird Life in Wild Wales.
By J. A. WALPOLE-BOND.

Illustrated from Photographs by
OLIVER G. PIKE.

LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN.

GOLDEN EAGLES AND EAGLETS.

(From a Drawing by Josef Wolff. Reproduced by permission of His Grace the Duke of Westminster.)

BIRDS I HAVE KNOWN

BY

ARTHUR H. BEAVAN

AUTHOR OF "MARLBOROUGH HOUSE AND ITS OCCUPANTS," ETC.

LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE · MCMV

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

(*All rights reserved.*)

https://archive.org/details/birdsihaveknown0000arth

PREFACE

THIS book records my experience of birds during many years in many lands and on many seas, my sole purpose being to bring to its reader's notice the ways and habits of these beautiful creatures of the Almighty.

I hope the work will be the forerunner of others dealing with Nature "like an open book," uncomplicated by references to scientific theories as to the origin and distribution of species.

ARTHUR H. BEAVAN.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	BIRDS OF MY CHILDHOOD	1
II.	BIRDS OF MY SCHOOL-DAYS	19
III.	BIRDS OF MY SCHOOL-DAYS (*continued*)	28
IV.	OCEANIC BIRDS	40
V.	OCEANIC BIRDS (*continued*)	55
VI.	AUSTRALASIAN BIRDS	66
VII.	BIRDS OF THE WEST COAST OF SOUTH AMERICA	85
VIII.	RIVER PLATE BIRDS	98
IX.	BRAZILIAN BIRDS	112
X.	CORNISH BIRDS	127

CHAPTER PAGE

XI. CORNISH BIRDS (*continued*) . . . 152

XII. LONDON BIRDS 171

XIII. LONDON BIRDS (*continued*) . . 187

XIV. BIRDS OF PASSAGE 204

XV. BIRDS OF PASSAGE (*continued*) . . 217

XVI. MISCELLANEOUS BIRDS . . 235

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

GOLDEN EAGLES AND EAGLETS. By J. Wolff. *Frontispiece*

PAGE

MISSEL THRUSH 23

STORMY PETREL 37

BOOBY 45

MOLLY HAWK 48

GREAT WANDERING ALBATROSS 52

CASSOWARY 69

BLACK SWAN 71

GIANT CROWNED PIGEON 81

PENGUIN 96

EAGLE 100

TINAMOU 106

SCREAMER 109

HUMMING BIRD 114

BOAT-BILL 123

GARGANEY TEAL 133

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER 135

PAGE

BLACK-THROATED DIVER 137

MERGANSER 139

GUILLEMOT 140

RINGED GUILLEMOT 142

RINGED PLOVER 144

RED SHANK 146

RED-THROATED DIVER 148

CURLEW 151

CHOUGH 153

JACKDAW 154

RAVEN 156

SPOONBILL 160

HOUSE MARTIN 167

BLACK-FACED GULL 178

WOOD-WARBLER 189

SEDGE-WARBLER 191

SPARROWS 195

FLAMINGO 211

IBIS 214

QUAIL 220

BIRD OF PARADISE 233

YELLOW WAGTAIL 246

J. B. DAWES, LENDING LIBRARY NEATH

CHAPTER I

BIRDS OF MY CHILDHOOD

I HAVE always loved birds, and am told that, in ages past, I must have been one. But I don't believe in transmigration of souls, nor in the theory that birds were at one time reptiles and have developed themselves into their present higher form of life. I am content to accept the unquestioning creed of my little son, who maintains that, "As the Bible says 'God on the fifth day created every winged fowl after their kind,' it is no use saying that He *didn't!*"

When a child in petticoats, I was introduced to my first bird acquaintances, the hedge-sparrows at the bottom of the sloping lawn of a country house. In time-honoured fashion I was assured that if I could place some salt on their tails, they (the birds, as well as their tails) would become mine.

A sympathetic cook having contributed the requisite condiment, I crept with stealthy and noise-

less steps towards a couple of slender, rusty-brown birds, flirting up their tails to such an extent that I wondered how on earth the salt would remain on.

Trembling with expectation, I decreased the distance between us to a few yards. One more step, and, to my bitter disappointment, the birds silently slipped into the nearest hedge and disappeared.

But shortly afterwards I was abundantly consoled, for my nurse and I met a farmer's boy in a narrow lane, who, for the reasonable sum of one penny, offered to show us a hedge-sparrow's nest containing eggs!

This was a treat indeed. We had not far to go, for the nest was close by, low down among the hawthorns, through which I peeped and espied a bundle of feathers with two nervous little eyes twinkling in their midst. The mother glided off, disclosing, in a cup of moss, wool, and horse-hair, five small eggs. I was allowed to take home one of these, whose colour, I afterwards came to learn, was, perhaps, the most exquisite shade of pale blue in the world.

That solitary egg—smashed, of course, while being "blown" by the united efforts of an elder brother and two nursemaids—gave birth to the passion of my life. Henceforth nests, eggs, nest-

lings, and winged fowls of every description were to me an enthralling study.

Robins were my favourites, but my love of them developed the selfish desire to *catch* them, and so the primitive "sieve-and-long-string" arrangement was requisitioned. Too often was it successful, and so often, alas! was poor Bob killed by the cruel rim beating down upon his little heart, that this form of sport was before long prohibited.

Chickens and ducklings I discreetly adored *at a distance*, deterred from closer approach by the vigilant mothers, whose feathers bristled like porcupine-quills at the least sign of familiarity between me and their offspring. While as to goslings or turkey-poults! Well, to begin with, they were seldom to be seen, except in farmyards, and, as a matter of fact, I would not for worlds have dared to confront their watchful guardians, the hissing gander or the much be-frilled and wrathful "Bubbly Jock."

Wrens, I fondly believed, were the wives of robins, having seen them somewhere described as "God Almighty's cock and hen"! Blackbirds, I naturally conjectured, were negroid thrushes; while swallows and swifts, I imagined, *slept* on the wing.

The laying out of food (chiefly bread) for all kinds of birds, was a daily and solemn rite. In

stormy weather it was attended with the hope that angels might thus unawares be entertained in the likeness of nightingales, whom none of us children had ever seen in the flesh, but of whose exquisite vocal achievements at uncanny hours we had heard with hushed amazement. Alas! the angels never came to partake of our hospitality; and no one told us that Philomela was an insect-eater and disdained vulgar crumbs.

I lived in a dreary London square, my father's house being of the "highly respectable" professional man's type, where pets were regarded as "out of place" by its mistress; but my father was sympathetic, and on the leads of a large kitchen at the back I was allowed to keep such small deer as rabbits and guinea-pigs. Birds were apparently considered inappropriate to childhood.

Compensation there was in the Regent's Park, close by, where the water-fowl engaged my closest attention. On certain great occasions, birthdays and the like, we were all taken to the Zoo, the *old* Zoo, with its dismal, smelling cages for the monkeys, its dens for the lions and tigers, and its wretched accommodation for the birds. But I revelled in it, feeding all the creatures indiscriminately on stale buns, and wondering why they were contemptuously ignored by the eagles and vultures.

During a certain delightful visit there, one of my brothers, having teased a monkey out of all patience, found it dragging his straw-hat by the crown through the bars. He held firmly on to the broad brim, which was soon all that remained to him, for the crown was left in the clutches of the triumphant ape! So, with a white handkerchief tied on his head, as though he had been scalped, my brother slunk home abashed, and for years afterwards he resented the slightest reference to monkeys.

One hot summer we were taken to Margate, where I first made acquaintance with a living gull —a poor, tame creature, with the pinion feathers of one wing cut—paddling about in the basin of an old fountain in the back garden, or drearily reposing on one leg on the shabby grass-plot. One fact greatly impressed me : its unlimited power of digestion. It seemed capable of eating all day long. To supplement its rations, I used to hunt for crabs at low water—with certain fear and trembling, I confess, though the minute specimens I conveyed home were incapable of nipping even a butterfly.

Stored in a handkerchief, I used to carry them into the nursery, and early one morning the housemaid was amazed by the apparition in the hall of a dozen green *crustacea*, which in the night had

escaped from durance vile, and, step by step, had contrived to descend the stairs in search of their natural element. This, however, they were destined never again to see, for the capacious pink throat of the lesser black-back gull soon received them unto itself. The same day a neighbour captured a large rat, also offered up at the shrine of Gulldom—a terrific peck on its head, and the rodent followed in the wake of the crabs down the dismal cavity.

CHAPTER II

BIRDS OF MY SCHOOL-DAYS

AT the age of ten I was sent to a boarding-school of the old-fashioned, expensive, and unsatisfactory kind, forty miles away from London.

Well-fed and warmed at home, my experience at Homer House was, to say the least of it, a painful surprise. I had insufficient food—and that was vile—and, except for a few weeks in the summer, I was always cold.

What does the present-day schoolboy, to whom everything is made pleasant, and whose dietary is excellent, know of the wretchedness of his elders—fathers, uncles, &c.—at school!

To bed at 8.30, by the light of a rush tallow candle stuck in an iron lantern pierced with holes, such as one sees in an old-fashioned pantomime, blown out within a severely limited time, and under no condition re-lit.

Winter and summer alike, the bell—that dismal

bell that murdered sleep—rang at 6.30, and we had to turn out. As the bare dormitories were never warmed, in frosty weather the water in the jugs was often frozen hard, and had to be broken before we could perform our ablutions.

At 6.45 prayers were offered up in a big, blank room with a fireplace at one end, to which near access was rendered impossible by the immense size of the fireguard.

From 7 to 8 o'clock our heads were bent over uninteresting lessons ; our thoughts being chiefly occupied with our empty stomachs.

At 8 o'clock, breakfast. What a pitiful meal it was! Slabs of bread, two inches thick, smeared with grease ; the weakest of tea, boiled in a copper, and served from huge white jugs into thick, ugly mugs.

Nothing more to sustain us until one o'clock. Then dinner, with its ponderous joints, black outside, blue within, while the boy who, of the two evils, preferred the *black*, invariably got a helping of *blue*, and vice versa. These terrible legs of mutton, and rumps of beef were, on certain days, varied by real and unmistakable "resurrection-pies," in large tin dishes, the crust an alluring golden brown, the interior a ghastly collection of scraps—"plate-leavings," we asserted—soaked in

a gravy of uncanny hue. Few boys partook of those pies, and the daring few who *did* venture to sample them were promptly boycotted. Of vegetables we had none, save potatoes ; and when, one dismal season, the kindly tubers failed, we had boiled rice as a substitute.

Tea, at 6 o'clock, was simply a repetition of breakfast, and not another morsel of food had we until 8 o'clock the next morning. No wonder that dormitory "feeds" of sausage rolls, cheese, and raspberry vinegar were frequent when funds permitted.

There was no semblance of home-life. Even on Sundays we had lessons on the Catechism and the much abhorred Greek Testament. Bullying abounded ; and, altogether, I think we were a most miserable set of boys.

Yet even at Homer House the wind was tempered to the shorn lamb, and I, the thinnest, shyest, and most sensitive little boy in the school, found compensation for some of its miseries.

The house was in a bird-haunted district, and I soon became the champion nest-finder and egg-collector among the ninety "young gentlemen" who constituted the establishment.

Saturdays were entire half-holidays, the Wednesday half-holidays being ruined by the preparation

of lessons from seven to eight in the evening. I, with one or two kindred spirits, who detested the cricket practice and wished to evade it—to the disgust of the majority of the boys—were allowed on these "free" days to go for long walks. Our hunting-ground was a large park, through which the public were permitted to decorously walk; but we boys, regardless of consequences, used to stray whither we liked, careful only to avoid the keepers' lodges.

Nothing came amiss to us there. Plovers' nests—most difficult to trace—we were very clever in finding. Chaffinches' nests abounded in some splendid old hawthorn-trees, and were our most beloved prizes, being perfect gems of finish and coziness. But we soon learned to leave the nests alone and to take only a tithe of the eggs, leaving two or three for the mother to go on with.

We were not clever enough to discover the homes of owls, goldfinches, or robins. Starlings we could easily find, but their nests were generally inaccessible. We used to hunt along the streams for kingfishers' burrows, as there existed a tradition, handed down from one generation of boys to another, that £100 could be obtained for a nest in perfect condition.

Thrushes' and blackbirds' nests were so readily

MISSEL THRUSH.

found that we were not particularly interested in them, and the eggs were a drug in the market. Buntings were scarce, skylarks were rarely run to earth, and I suppose we were not sharp enough to trace such small fry as wrens and tits to their well-concealed retreats.

We flew, however, at higher game, poaching pheasants' eggs, and climbed the tall pines for hawks', ring-doves, and even herons.

In the park was a series of fine lakes, where great quantities of wild-fowl were reared. These we longed to get at, but never succeeded, until one day—it was Sunday afternoon, and we had obtained, as a great favour, leave of absence—by the side of a rivulet we unexpectedly put up a duck, with her nearly fledged "flappers." Instantly she scuttled into the water and disappeared, followed by her family. Then ensued a chase I shall never forget. After a minute or two they reappeared some distance off, and having stalked them along the bank, we plunged in after the brood, who once more dived with much dexterity. We and they went through this performance several times, but after a while—it seemed to us an hour!—the ducklings got tired, and I, watching my opportunity, captured a fine specimen, with which we decamped.

With the unfortunate prisoner stuffed into my jacket, we walked back to the town. It was a long distance, and the weather was warm, and I was in mortal terror lest the duck's faint quacking should be heard by some passing constable. It was, as I have said, Sunday, and our object was to meet the school on its way to church, and to join in the "two-by-two" procession.

In this we succeeded, having previously tied up the captive firmly in a pocket-handkerchief and concealed it in a hedge close to the church!

What a long service that was! We were on tenter-hooks of suspense, anticipating that every moment might be the duckling's *last*—suffocation appearing to be inevitable.

However, all things come to an end, even a prosy sermon divided into twelve "heads," and supplemented by four "lastlys."

Slipping away, we reached the hedge to find the poor sufferer alive, and loudly giving vent to its indignation. Once more it was stowed away in my pocket, and again we succeeded in rejoining the ranks, and arrived at the school triumphant. The next day I sold the duck to a bird-fancier for, I think, one shilling—a shameful and sordid transaction, I admit.

Our next great "find" involved a thrilling adventure.

For a couple of Saturdays we had cast envious eyes upon a goose—not a common one, by any means—nesting on an islet in the middle of a small lake, sitting on eggs, we conjectured. But to make sure, we contrived, by throwing stones, to drive her off; and sure enough three magnificent specimens were revealed. We were determined to get possession of them, or die in the attempt. So the following Saturday found us by the lake-side glowing with expectation.

The goose had vanished. There was no one in sight for miles. Now was the opportunity. But how were we to get across to the island? There was no boat, nor even a large branch to float out upon, but the water was only a foot or two deep, so we decided that one of us must wade across. Who was it to be? The lot fell to me, because I could swim a little!

I took off my shoes and stockings, rolled up my trousers as high as I could, and stepped into the water. Alas! I had not thought of the many years' accumulation of mud! Deeper and deeper I sank, until the water was much beyond my waist; but I held on, encouraged by the encomiums of my companions safe on the bank, and,

arrived at the nest, secured a couple of eggs and retraced my muddy steps. I was in an "awful mess," and had to strip and wash in a clear pool, but the deathly smell of decayed leaf-mould stuck to me for a week.

As a fitting climax to this adventure, the eggs were addled, and directly a hole was made in their shells for the purpose of "blowing," the odour was so awful that we were compelled to throw them away—a serious loss to us collectors, as the goose was a rare one.

I don't know to what length we would not have gone in collecting birds and other creatures. How we escaped being run in by some of the numerous keepers has always been a mystery to me. Our audacity culminated in the cool appropriation of a newly dropped fawn, which we wildly hoped to smuggle into the town and to dispose of for a certain amount of "filthy lucre." But the sight of the infuriated mother, a fallow deer, advancing upon us with flashing eyes and lowered head, so terrified us that, relinquishing our prey, we fled, and never made a second attempt upon Lord Ebor's venison.

J. B. DAWES
LENDING
LIBRARY
NEATH.

CHAPTER III

BIRDS OF MY SCHOOL-DAYS (*continued*)

FASHION is a tyrant from which there is no deliverance. And this applies even to school-life.

Regularly as the sun's rising and setting, the peg-top season came round, when at every possible moment, every boy, forsooth, must spin one; and woe betide the youth of independent taste who dared to set fashion at defiance, and recreate himself with something else. The same with cricket, football, hockey, rounders, marbles; each had its own proper season, rigidly adhered to.

With spring and summer came the time for keeping pets, and for rearing young birds. Dogs were strictly prohibited, and so were fowls; but for some reason (though theoretically *any* sort of pet was forbidden), the "powers that were" winked at squirrels, white mice, dormice, hedgehogs, and rabbits, and secretly encouraged birds. Our lava-

tories were the only places where pets could be kept, and they were crammed with cages, wherein the four-footed creatures passed a very dull existence, and boxes containing nests of hawks, owls, jays, blackbirds, thrushes, and chaffinches, purchased from country-boys who brought them round, and who were always certain of a good market if we happened to have any pocket-money, credit in these transactions being sternly refused.

Our feathered youngsters seldom lived, being gorged with unsuitable food at one or two periods in the day, and half-starved during the intervals, while water, a vital necessity, was seldom given to them. We really had not the chance of feeding them properly, *i.e.*, in very small quantities and incessantly.

Hawks require a dietary of small birds; jays, fresh meat; thrushes and blackbirds, snails and worms. Snails and worms we were too lazy to hunt for. Sparrows, however, could be obtained from the gardener, but they cost pence; so after a time we had to fall back upon raw beef, and we served it indiscriminately to the whole lot, which did not suit our pets.

My chief delight was in a kestrel, which I christened Moses. There happened to be a run upon Scriptural names at the moment, and Moses

was unappropriated. Moses belied his name, for he was by no means "very meek," but combative and resistant. At first there was no taming him. Though not fully fledged, his beak and claws needed no further development. When any one approached, his invariable proceeding was to lean back, standing on one leg, with a wing up-lifted, his curved beak in position for striking, and one sharp-clawed leg held out like a sword ready to grab everything in the shape of a finger that might present itself. I had to adopt the starvation principle, the bread-and-water of affliction, and I met with eminent success.

After a week of meagre rations, it dawned upon Moses that I was not a foe, but a friend—a friend who represented unlimited food, including dead sparrows, and the fierce glance began to fade from the beautiful eyes when I approached; and one morning he let me treat him to pieces of raw liver with one hand, and stroke his head and glossy back with the other.

I succeeded in rearing Moses, and when the summer-holidays began I took him home, where I kept him on the leads. He used to sit on my arm like a parrot, and never attempted violence or escape. But, alas! one morning I missed him. The cage door had been left slightly open; he

had pushed against it, hopped out, and perhaps, hearing the call of some bird that recalled his mother's cry, had used his wings (they were not clipped) and soared away, doubtless surprised to find that he could fly so well without any practice.

Of course, I kept an owlet at school; but he was a failure. He had a trick of lying on his back and hissing like a cat, clawing with both legs if annoyed, which he often was. This habit I could have mitigated in time, had I been able to feed him properly. But this I could not do; for the mice-larder was frequently bare, and young sparrows were not always forthcoming; and as a fair proportion of "fur and feathers" are necessary to an owlet's existence, he pined away on a raw-flesh dietary, and died. *Requiescat in pace.*

Jays are pretty birds, but we found them a decided nuisance. They were not popular. Their gape is prodigious, and they are always craving for food. You cannot look at them when young, without their uttering a peculiar and irritatingly hungry cry; and do what you will you cannot satisfy them. "Oliver Twists" we called them, forgetting that it was only once that poor Oliver asked for "more."

At this period my relations with certain birds were, I regret to say, not so commendable.

Attached to our school-house was a splendid, walled-in kitchen garden, the headmaster's private property. We were forbidden to climb its walls, or even to enter it when the gate was open. It was full of fruit-trees, and, consequently, of sparrows that came there to eat the grubs, and *not* the buds. This eclecticism on the part of the sparrows was ridiculed by the old gardener, who looked upon them as his natural enemies, to be classed with such "varmints" as cats, dogs, and boys! He was a queer character, morose, silent, and rough, but he took a fancy to me, and when I defied the law and climbed into the Paradise (which was not seldom) he did not report me to the master, but rather encouraged me, *because I set traps for birds.*

He himself would not have stooped to such a slow method of destruction—successful though it was—and used to shoot his little enemies in an extraordinary fashion, holding the gun not to the shoulder, but to the hips with one hand. How he contrived to aim, I don't know; but he was an excellent shot, and slaughtered sparrows wholesale.

One cold winter day I succeeded in securing a supply of his victims gratis, and, with a select committee of chums, proceeded to convert them into sparrow-pudding in the hope of appeasing our pangs of hunger.

I must explain that between school-hours we were allowed to go anywhere inside the house, except into the kitchens and dormitories; and outside, anywhere within "bounds." Therefore when we contemplated any unusual enormity—such as the making of toffee in pipkins, which always turned out too soft or too hard to eat—we pitched upon one of the smaller class-rooms, where we could carry out our plans without fear of interruption.

Well, the wretched sparrows were plucked and drawn in barbarous manner, too much of the inside being removed or too little. After trussing them in a primitive way, we adjourned to a nice warm class-room not likely to be invaded by the masters. We knew that meat puddings required paste, but how to make it was a puzzle. So when some one suggested "just flour and water, like the paste we make for sticking," we welcomed the "happy thought" with acclamation.

The mixture was made thick by grubby hands, and into the horrible compound the birds were entombed. The "pudding" was then tied up in a *clean* pocket-handkerchief and placed in a saucepan that we had temporarily annexed. Water was poured in, brought to the boil, and in less than an hour the dish was pronounced to be ready, and was devoured! We had previously tried roasting our

game before the fire, with a piece of string for a spit; but as none of us had the patience to perpetually twist it, the half-raw carcases were flung away.

In the holidays my favourite haunts were Leadenhall Market (the old one), a bazaar in Regent Street where Queen's Hall now stands, Great St. Andrew's Street, St. Martin's Lane, and a certain shop in Charlotte Street, Finsbury Square, in all of which I could revel in the contemplation of many specimens of birds and their eggs.

At Leadenhall Market there were often wonderful birds that I knew nothing about, except from books: curious waders, such as oyster-catchers, black and white plumaged, bill and feet a beautiful red; avocets, with beaks turned up the wrong way; occasionally ruffs and reeves, the former with their necks surrounded by a ridiculous collar of long feathers; quails, mandarin and summer ducks, strange-looking geese from Russia, with ruffled feathers pointing forwards instead of backwards; herons, cranes, gulls, and—very rarely indeed—bearded tits and grebes. So long and admiringly used I to gaze at these creatures that the proprietor of the stalls—they were hardly shops—came to regard me (since I was never a purchaser) with suspicion, and I had to move on.

At the Regent Street Bazaar, in St. Martin's Lane, and at the Charlotte Street shop there was always a wealth of singing and other small birds, and a grand collection of eggs duly labelled with name *and* price.

The latter was a mournful and deterrent fact to me, and I mentally vowed to hasten the days when I might *earn* money and be able to spend it all upon what I was pleased to term "Natural History." I dreamed of erecting a large aviary on the leads, and filling it with a kind of "happy family" of birds, the cannibalistic propensities of the raptorials being subdued by discipline.

Canaries I never kept. I think I disliked their voices; but with keen delight I used to watch, through a little door in the breeding-cage, a hen canary (belonging to a friend) sitting on her nest, and sometimes was rewarded with a momentary sight of her eggs.

Every now and again, to my great joy, there would come to the corner of some quiet street, a showman with white mice that ran up a miniature flag-staff, gallantly returning with a small ensign in their mouths; and red-poles and siskins, that fired cannons, pretended to be dead, revived at a given signal, and were carried away in a gorgeous coach drawn by harnessed white mice. I used to give all

the pence in my pocket to that showman, and implore him to begin all over again.

At Hastings, one autumn after a heavy gale, a stormy petrel was driven ashore in a dying condition. I shall never forget the old doctor (who was attending a member of my family) bringing it to our house, and my wonder that such a frail little thing could possibly ride out even a strong wind, much less a hurricane, as I was told it could. Its delicate, webbed feet, its curious, hooked beak, and its sooty black colour, greatly impressed me.

Little did I think that in the future I should make close acquaintance with hundreds of its kind —of gigantic proportions—on the wide ocean, thousands of miles from Hastings.

During another holiday I captured, in a strange, if not unique manner, a bird of a very different colour. I was fishing in South Wales, well-concealed in the bushes, my rod of course overhanging the river, when, without the slightest warning, a bird alighted on a branch just beneath my rod ! It was a beautiful kingfisher, all orange and light blue. It neither saw nor heard me, and sat there motionless for a second or two, watching for minnows. Impulsively I let the rod fall upon him. He was stunned, and I managed to drag him out of the stream, only to die in my hand. He was after-

STORMY PETREL.

wards stuffed, and presented with pride to, I fear, an unappreciative uncle, who objected to the killing of kingfishers by accident or otherwise.

It was about this period that my bump of destructiveness began rapidly to develop. Instead of making *pets* of birds, I went in for *killing* them, my object being to get a collection of "stuffed" birds." I shot my first wild duck in one of the numerous water-courses in Norfolk, after an exciting stalk. I let fly at him as he sat in the water —a most unsportsmanlike proceeding. Killed, for a wonder (for a duck's thick plumage often resists the shot), he floated away. Dreadfully afraid of losing him, I plunged in and secured him. Though out of season for eating, he was in full bridal plumage with a shining speculum patch of blue on his wings; and I thought him lovely.

There were herons about the locality, but I could never get within shot of the wily, long-necked things. Once I got up at three o'clock in the morning, and was ready at daybreak in a boat just below a clump of trees on the bank where they nested. But no! Some sentinel heron twigged me, gave the alarm, and instead of, as usual, flying over the water, they all slipped away on the opposite side.

Wood-pigeons I was always stalking, but as I

did not know the right way to circumvent them, I invariably returned empty-handed.

My first partridge I secured in Berkshire by firing right into the "brown" of a covey, when one of them, after flying a short distance, towered into the air, and fell down with a single pellet through its head.

Pheasant-shooting, I was assured, was easy enough, but I did not find it so. The dead silence in the woods—broken only by the scuttling away of rabbits, while the dogs did their best to put up the birds—affected my nerves; and when, after intense suspense, my particular dog stopped dead, then, dashing into a thicket, disturbed a firework display of feathers that rose with a kind of crow, I would wildly fire—anywhere, except at the pheasant. One never-to-be-forgotten day I brought down a cockbird that had lingered a little too long, and had risen clear of the bushes. There it lay, magnificent—the finest I had seen in my life.

But I was about to be introduced to very different phases of bird-life, of which you will read in the next chapter.

J. B. DAWES.
LENDING
LIBRARY
NEATH.
THE SWANSEA BOOK CO.

CHAPTER IV

OCEANIC BIRDS

DOES any one realise what an abundance of feathered life there is on, or by, the great waters of the deep?

The seagulls flying between the mouth of the Thames and London are, in the winter, familiar objects to many children. They see them in hundreds, near Westminster Bridge or in St. James's Park, having a "good time" when sprats are plentiful; and, as evening approaches, long lines of them may be observed on their way to roost in some chosen inland spot. But very few children, I believe, realise that they may be seen in thousands round our coasts, and miles away from land following a ship in the Channel, uttering their plaintive cry, and apparently indifferent to the vagaries of weather. They are children of the sea, not of land.

But they are not oceanic birds; they never stray

very far from the coast, and their numbers are comparatively insignificant.

I have seen many lands in the course of my life, have traversed many seas, and experienced the usual discomforts inseparable from travel. But I shall never forget my first voyage! Now I am not going to describe it, but will relate my experience solely in relation to the birds I met with during the voyage.

Well, you must picture a large sailing ship of the old-fashioned East Indian type. She lay off Gravesend, waiting for her passengers, the latest letters, the pilot, and last, but not least, the captain. That most important person having come alongside, the tug was made fast, the signal given to weigh the anchor, the blue-peter fluttered down from the fore-royal masthead, and the good ship *Superb* started on her long voyage to Melbourne.

Oh, that awful first bout of sea-sickness! The after-effects of a boy's first smoke are as nothing to it! The deadly nausea, the utter collapse, the wretched indifference to life that comes over one as the stately ship, after curtseying to the rising waves, begins to roll and pitch, and one's stomach threatens to precipitate itself over the bows! Who does not know it?

But prolong the agony to a period of, say, four days or a week, when the ship is trying to beat down Channel in the teeth of a brave south-west wind, wearily tacking again and again, each time to find she has gained but a few miles of coast. *Then* one does indeed learn what it is *to be ill!*

When the wind rose to a gale, I cared nothing whether the *Superb* went down or not. But the climax of my misery was not attained until the fourth day, when through the cabin door came the reek, not of boiled mutton or roast pork—which had already been manifest—but of fried steak and onions—at all times my abomination, and which the steward ingratiatingly informed me was done "to a turn."

Oh, the smell of that odious dish! Better to draw a veil over its immediate results, and simply say that my agonies, which had been slowly subsiding, came back with redoubled vigour, until, worn out and exhausted, I slept the sleep of the *very* just.

At last the wind shifted, the ship rode easier, and I woke up to find that all trace of nausea had vanished. I was ravenously hungry, and feared that *nothing* would satisfy my craving for food, since the more I ate the more I wanted to devour.

Getting on deck, after a Gargantuan banquet of ham and eggs and coffee, I saw that the old *Superb* was at the mouth of the Channel, off the Lizard, all sails set, making her proper course, and leaving England at last in good earnest.

I discovered that I was not so voracious, after all, as the gulls that were following us in flocks. Nothing came amiss to them. When anything eatable was thrown overboard by the cook or steward, it was hailed with screams of delight as they battled for it, all in a heap together—common gulls, kittiwakes, black-heads, and terns—just touching the water with their feet and beaks, and flying off with some choice morsel to devour in peace.

These lively companions made some amends for the emptiness of the air, bounded only by the horizon. We had not long completely cleared the Channel, however, when they deserted us, as though they had been commissioned just to see us safely away from our beloved country.

I was told that as the ship beat down Channel, tacking as she approached the shore, tit-larks, finches, and buntings flew into the rigging, and, after a good rest and a free passage from England to France, took leave. While nearing Madeira a blue-headed wagtail flew wearily on board, and

ran about on the deck after some flies in the cook's galley. It must have travelled from Africa —six hundred miles distant—so no wonder it was tired and hungry. We collected all the flies we could for the poor thing, and it became so tame that it actually ate them out of our hand. For two nights it roosted in the rigging, afterwards invading the saloon and cabins, and catching flies for itself. Finally, when thoroughly recruited, it took its leave, and, with a fair wind, flew back to France.

We had another bird visitor of the shore kind later on, when between the Canaries and Cape Verde Islands, at least five hundred miles from land. It was a pretty little finch, grey merging into green beneath like a linnet, probably a wild canary in its undomesticated plumage, blown off from La Palmas or Teneriffe. It flew on to the poop, quite exhausted. We tried to keep it alive, but the terrible journey had been too much for its strength, and it succumbed, deeply lamented by everybody on board, especially the children, who expressed a serious desire to read the Burial Service over it.

Approaching the tropics, one or two boobies—a species of gannet, black, with white breast, green beak, and a stupid expression—appeared high up

BOOBY.

on the yards, and a sailor, sent up to secure one, found that although called "boobies" (because they allow of easy capture), they have wit enough to peck; and so furiously did this one attack the man with his dagger-like bill, that it nearly succeeded in getting away. I forget what became of it, but I have an idea that the sailors made an attempt to eat it.

We passed out of sight of the islands of Fernando Noronha (off the Brazilian coast), Martin Vas, and Trinidad. Even without sextant or chronometer we should have known we were in the tropics by the presence of frigate-birds hovering, with expansive spread of wing, high overhead, looking out for flying-fish. They appeared to be black, with white breast, cormorant-like beak and long, forked tails, and were evidently raptorial. Hence, perhaps, their name. They were in company with tropic birds, called by the sailors "boatswains," because the tail, with its two long, narrow feathers, resembles the iron marline-spike used in repairing the rigging, &c., under the boatswain's superintendence.

It is a light-coloured bird, about the size of a pheasant, the back barred black and white (though in some cases it is pure white or pink), the beak a true coral-hued tern's, and the feet webbed.

Seldom is either a frigate or tropic bird secured on a voyage unless the captain can be prevailed upon to lower a boat for the purpose of recovering one that has been shot from the deck.

For many days these were the only feathered creatures we saw ; but when we had crossed the Equator, and reached the latitude of about 35°, and it began to feel cold, we were told to look out for the real oceanic birds we had heard so much about.

I was continually straining my eyes to catch the first sight of them, but I generally looked in the wrong direction—ahead, instead of astern.

One day the chief officer came up to me and said, " Now, sir, if you will look astern, you will find a 'mollyhawk' coming up quickly." I didn't know what he meant by a " mollyhawk," but I ran to the taffrail, and there, just upon a level with the mizzen-top, was the biggest gull I had ever seen, making towards us with the greatest ease, never moving its wings, so it seemed, although we were bowling along at ten knots an hour. He sailed round and round the ship again and again, and from the poop we could almost touch him. I soon saw he was not exactly a gull, nor a true petrel. He had a black back ; the rest of his body was white ; and over his big, intelligent eyes were

MOLLYHAWK.

dark eyebrows. Hence he is known both as the "black-browed" albatross, and as the "black-backed" albatross. There is a variety with a yellow ridge along its beak, known as the "yellow-nosed" albatross.

Presently three or four others appeared, from what quarter no one could say, and the wind began to fail. My friend, the mate, called out, "This is your chance, if you want to catch a mollyhawk. There's a lot more moving about." And on the horizon were several specks, which soon resolved themselves, not into mollyhawks, but into those most gracefully formed creatures, the sooty albatrosses, with their soft-hued plumage, black backs and beaks, and well-defined rim round the eyes, suggestive of spectacles.

The *Superb* was now making only three or four knots an hour; so a long and strong line was got ready, to the end of which was secured a sail-maker's barbless hook, supported in the water by several corks. On to the hook was slipped and tied a piece of fat salt pork. A long slack of the line was carefully coiled on the deck, near the taffrail, and as the birds in their circuit of the ship approached the poop, the slack was gently dropped overboard and more line let out, and thus the bait for a few moments was motionless, for

oceanic birds will not, if they can help it, alight on anything that moves through the water.

No sooner was the dainty morsel perceived, than the "mollies" arrested their course, folded their huge wings, put out their webbed feet, and skilfully alighted close to the pork, towards which they exultingly paddled, like so many geese.

It was an exciting moment. Yet more line was paid out, and we realised the necessity of possessing a long one. The first bird to arrive at the prize dipped down his head and took hold of it. At that instant the third officer—an old hand at the sport—gave a gentle twitch of the line, and the hook firmly caught against the inside of the birds upper mandible at the tip, without penetrating.

Now came an exhibition of skill. At the least slackening, the hook would have fallen out, so a steady strain was kept while the line was hauled in, with the "molly" at one end, struggling with might and main against being compulsorily dragged along, his companions looking vastly astonished at the indignity to which their friend was subjected.

He was brought just beneath the taffrail, carefully lifted clear of everything, and let loose on

deck ;[1] when, to our astonishment, we realised his true proportions, which measured from tip to tip of his outstretched wings 7 feet 6 inches.

His first proceeding was to be sea-sick, and to stagger about like an apprentice on his first voyage. He was then condemned to death for the sake of his skin, but the tender-hearted doctor, to prevent bloodshed and blundering, speedily settled this business with prussic acid.

The sooty albatrosses were shy on this occasion, but I was very successful with them as we got further south.

But the true wandering albatross—the emperor of the ocean—whose acquaintance we so much desired, had not yet made his appearance. For some days we saw him not, when, suddenly, while vainly fishing for mollyhawks, the ship moving fast through the water, one came upon the scene!

Mollies and sooties sank into insignificance

[1] Albatrosses cannot rise suddenly from the water, or any level surface, like ordinary wild-fowl. They have to scuttle along, and thus launch themselves into the air. When on the wing they cannot seize anything, as gulls do, floating in the water, but have to alight to take their food, which consists, not of fish, but of blubber, if they can find the carcass of a whale, of shelless molluscs, and largely of squid (small cuttle-fish), whose horny beaks I have invariably found in albatrosses' stomachs.

GREAT WANDERING ALBATROSS.

beside this magnificent bird, soon followed by several others, all about the same size, but varying in colour. Their stretch of wing is immense, averaging ten feet, and sometimes exceeding fourteen feet.[1]

I cannot do justice to their splendid appearance when flying. Without the least apparent effort or perceptible movement of their pinions, they majestically swept round the ship, and, in passing the stern, turned their graceful necks and looked inquiringly with their large brown eyes at the passengers, as if at old friends. Their great beaks, seven inches long, curved at the end of the upper mandible, as well as their necks, are suffused with the most lovely rose-pink—which fades after death—their breasts are white, and their backs white, flecked and barred with black, in proportion to their age.[2] The beak, apparently formidable and strong, is not so, and is used only for eating soft food, such as squid, and, occasionally, a dead whale. I have frequently held the beak of a living albatross wide open, without being injured.

[1] The only bird that approaches this measurement is the condor of the Andes.

[2] The variation of colouring in the gull and petrel tribes is confusing. It continues for three years, and sometimes causes the naturalist to imagine he has comes across a new species.

In the mature birds the plumage is superb, snow-white. These, however, are seldom seen at sea, which is somewhat singular, as one would naturally suppose they would follow their young ones, after forsaking the desolate islands where they nest, laying only one egg. But the greater number of "wandering" albatrosses seen from ships are immature, not old birds.

Too much wind the great albatross cannot have for his own enjoyment. He revels in gales, and as he sails mysteriously against the mighty force of on-rushing air, he brings to one's mind the wonderful lines of Addison (in his poem on the Duke of Marlborough), where he speaks of the Angel, who—

> "Pleased the Almighty's orders to perform,
> Rides on the whirlwind and directs the storm."

CHAPTER V

OCEANIC BIRDS (*continued*)

WE captured several of these fine gentlemen in the usual manner after a great struggle, three men at the line being sometimes required to overcome their strength and power of resistance.

It was an exciting moment, when, catching sight of the smaller albatrosses swimming up to the bait, a big fellow checked himself, disclosed two immense, flesh-coloured, webbed-feet that had been snugly tucked in beneath his tail, opened them out like fans, and descended with a splash; and when he found himself dragged along, there came over his face a look of astonishment almost human.

One of them got his head under the sea while being hauled in. His beak being wide open, he became water-logged, and, consequently, so heavy that five sailors could hardly drag him on board. When they held him upside down to get rid of

the water, gallons poured out of his stomach, and thus he ignominiously died.

On their feet, with wings folded, albatrosses lose all dignity, and look like waddling swans, somewhat larger in body. The down and feathers, however, are six inches thick. In this coating, which wards off the most intense cold, parasites the size and shape of earwigs, nestle, dying with the bird they have so sadly teased in life. It is comical to watch a great albatross, as he sails round on the wing, scratching his cheeks and neck with his huge feet, trying to get rid of these pests. Whence do they come? Surely not from the pure waters of the ocean. Probably they are acquired in the guano-stained islands where the birds nest.

Once on board, albatrosses are, as we have observed, helpless; and unless they happen to have had no food for some time, are as ill-behaved as other oceanic birds.

Those we captured were promptly killed by the doctor, and for days afterwards the passengers were engaged in skinning them, making tobacco pouches out of the feet and pipe-stems from the hollow wing-bones, producing such a mess and smell of oily feathers that the chief officer gave vent to the strongest of swear-words; and even the easy-going captain observed that he should

be glad when we got into the "roaring forties," when it would be too rough to catch any more sea-birds.

The Portuguese and the Spaniards (whom we are apt to forget were skilful navigators and explorers long before the British Navy came to the front) called the albatross "alcatraz," a nomenclature that tells us nothing, since its literal meaning is a pelican.

The young student finds scientific names of birds somewhat unsatisfactory. As to the terms sailors apply to sea-birds—such as "cape hen," "cape sheep," "stink-pot," "mollyhawk," "whale-bird," &c.—they are no guide at all.

In the month of February, when hundreds of miles from the island of Tristan da Cunha, in about lat. 40° south, we witnessed a most unusual spectacle; even the captain, in his long career, had never seen the like of it.

Our good old craft was forging ahead with a steady $5\frac{1}{2}$-knot breeze from the N.E., the sea being rippled with wavelets as in the trade-winds. Suddenly the lookout-man on the forecastle-head called out, "Something queer, sir, right ahead!" The officer on the watch fetched his glass, and getting into the fore-shrouds, took a long look, and pronounced the "something queer" to be birds

sitting on the water. He went out to summon the captain, who was not over-pleased at being disturbed merely to look at sea-birds. But when the officer explained that there seemed "no end" of them, he went forward and climbed the foretop, I with him.

A wonderful sight presented itself! Ahead of us the sea was covered with birds, sitting head to wind, at regular intervals from one another; and as the *Superb* reached them, those nearest to her shuffled away without the least sign of alarm, but rather with an appearance of annoyance at being disturbed. They were of moderate size for oceanic birds—about two feet long in the body—and we judged them to be a kind of grey petrel with brown wings. Apparently there were both old and young in the vast assemblage; the feathers of many looked quite new.

Passing through their ranks, we found ourselves presently in the middle of a concourse that, from our elevation, could be seen eighteen miles in every direction, and which took six hours to get clear of.

It was fascinating and, in a sense, an awe-inspiring scene, this tremendous exuberance of life, and the absence of all cry or sound!—nothing to be heard but the lap, lap of the water against

the bows, the faint humming of the wind through the rigging, and the splash of the petrels as they partly rose on their wings to avoid being run down. Probably they thought we were a kind of winged whale.

Here we were, a thousand miles from the Cape, surrounded by millions of wild-fowl, calling no one master but the Almighty.

Their numbers may be accounted for by the presence of an unusual quantity of food in the water—the spawn of fish, or animalculæ—which we could not detect; or possibly, the nesting season in some far-distant land being over, they had all, parents and fully fledged children, thus betaken themselves to the wide ocean, their true home.

At last we cleared them, but how far they extended north and south beyond our limit of vision we could not tell. All we knew was that the man we sent up to survey from the main-royal masthead reported that he could still see them in those directions.

Our doctor, who was a bit of calculator, set to work to get some idea of the number of birds we could have seen from the foretop. He arrived at the conclusion that in three hours after we first came up to them we were in the centre of a circle

of birds thirty-six miles (counting the nautical mile as a statute one for the sake of convenience) in diameter, or a square of thirty-six miles, *i.e.*, 1,306 square miles, or 4,079,108,160 square yards.

Now, as each petrel, clear of his neighbour, occupied about three square yards of water-space, this would give 1,359,702,720 individuals—more than the population of the globe! But this was not all. For north and south of us were many more square miles covered by these birds.

None were captured by us, as with a fair wind we could not afford to stop to gratify a "mere fad." They refused all offers of bait, and would not come near enough to the bowsprit to be struck with the "grains" (a kind of Neptune's trident).

Cape pigeons all at once appeared in large numbers, and were easily caught with light lines. Reserving a few as specimens, we let the others go, tying round the legs of some of them a label bearing the ship's name, the latitude and longitude, and the date. Other vessels often recapture the pigeons, and with this tell-tale on them the bird's voyage can be traced. These petrels are about the size of large woodpigeons, and are prettily marked in chessboard pattern with black and white. Bad temper seems to characterise them; at any rate, they quarrel furiously over food

thrown in their midst. Ancient voyagers tell us that Cape pigeons are eatable. But what reliance can be placed upon the taste of men who relished penguins and dodos?

However, we thought we would try them, so after skinning and soaking them in salt water, a few were artistically transformed into a sea-pie by the steward, the cook being temporarily incapacitated by reason of an injured hand.

The pie appeared on the cabin table, and was cut into by the captain, the steam issuing forth with an aroma more pronounced than appetising.

"Allow me, madam," he said, addressing the chief lady-passenger, "to give you some of this new sea-dish. I am told it is, as a rule, excellent."

"No, thank you, Captain," she laughingly replied. "The *odour* is enough for me."

The captain looked hurt, and, glancing round the table, saw refusal writ large on the face of every one.

"Mr. Jones," said he, addressing the chief officer, who sat opposite him, "you'll try it, I'm sure. Steward!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take this to Mr. Jones."

Alas! Mr. Jones put a morsel into his mouth and—*rushed on deck!*

"Pitch the beastly thing away, steward!" roared our host. The steward obeyed, and threw it, as we afterwards learnt, to a big retriever (a great pet on board), who, with his fine sea appetite, demolished it in no time. But in a few moments, in spite of his admirable digestive powers, *the sea-pie was in the scuppers!*

The fact is that the flesh of all oceanic birds, and Cape pigeons in particular, is impregnated with a horrible oily, musty flavour, which no amount of soaking in salt water will get rid of.

Once in the "forties," *i.e.*, between lat. 40° and 50° S., we sped along towards Australia at the rate of twelve knots an hour, day after day, without pause, impelled by a very strong wind from the S.W., followed by tremendous seas which necessitated the most careful steering, while we sighted neither ship nor island.

Bird-fishing was out of the question, although birds followed us untiringly, and only retired when we bore up northward and approached Bass Straits. Then the antipodean gulls—much resembling our own—took up the running, and escorted the *Superb* through the Heads, and, by way of Port Philip (where pelicans were hard at work diving from a great height after food), as far as our anchorage in Hobson's Bay.

I have written about the oceanic birds usually seen by passengers on a voyage to Australia, *viâ* the Cape; but there are others that are rarely met with in the South Atlantic, though frequently in the South Pacific between New Zealand and Cape Horn.

Picture to yourself, or, better still, look at a large terrestrial globe, and note that from a latitude of, say, 35° S. to as far as the great southern ice-barrier, say, lat. 75°, there is practically nothing but water, interrupted only by small islands, New Zealand, and the tip of the South American Continent from Buenos Ayres on the east and Valparaiso on the west. Thus the playground and home of the pelagic birds comprises about one quarter of the entire globe.

In the South Pacific I have hooked the giant petrel, an enormous Mother Carey's chicken, nine feet across the wings, a great, heavy, dark-brown bird, with massive yellow petrel beak.

In furious gales off Cape Horn the familiar little stormy petrel, with white breast, black back, and long wings, turns up in hundreds, tripping it on the huge waves, and never seeming to tire. Once when the ship was hove to, *i.e.*, kept almost motionless, head to wind, so awful was the sea, with billows forty feet high, we were surrounded

by birds, many of a kind I had never seen before. I captured so many sooty albatrosses that the poop was crowded with them ; and as for Cape pigeons, there were enough to fill two long hen-coops. But after careful examination I liberated them, much to their astonishment.

Snowy petrels, or antarctic whale-birds—small, dove-coloured birds about the size of pigeons—swarmed, and were easily caught by means of a long line of stout thread with a small piece of wood at the end. This was blown by the high wind straight up into the air, and the petrels, not noticing it as they passed by, got entangled in the line, and were dragged along to the poop.

A curious black, medium-sized petrel was most persevering and hawk-like. He took the bait from the floating Cape-pigeon line with such force that he flew with it into the air, and was brought down exactly like a kite. It was a species new to me, and I hastened, as usual, to handle it, when I found I had caught a tartar. His beak was hooked at the tip, and his webbed feet were armed with the sharpest of claws, which left their mark on my hands for many a long day. It turned out to be the "great black petrel."

I caught, also, some petrels resembling those

we saw in the immense concourse near the Cape of Good Hope. They were between four and five feet in stretch of wing, and could readily dive—an accomplishment that not all oceanic birds possess—and whenever a piece of fat sank they caught it at a good depth, while envy was depicted on the faces of the onlooking birds less gifted by nature.

In calm weather oceanic birds lazily catch up the ship and paddle about her like domestic ducks and geese—a very pretty sight, as they exhibit no fear whatever of man, and are devoid of suspicion.

I could detect little of the comic element in the winged roamers o'er the great deeps—not any of those quaint ways one sees in their inland relatives. Life on the ocean wave is probably too serious to allow of the fun and frolic indulged in by such vagabonds as our magpies and jackdaws ashore.

What a pity it is that they cannot be acclimatised on our coasts, for they would be immensely ornamental. But they are true Bedouins of the great deep, despising civilisation, and when they are captured they—like a giant petrel (probably a straggler) I caught from a boat in Sydney Harbour and conveyed to the Zoo in that city—quickly pine away and die.

CHAPTER VI

AUSTRALASIAN BIRDS

TURNING to the subject of Australasian land birds, although they comprise between six and seven hundred different species—each of which is abundantly represented—and are of remarkable brilliance and beauty, they are often dubbed uninteresting, for it is only with considerable trouble that one can follow their movements; and this the average observer does not care to bestow.

So marvellously does their colouring (even that of the parrots and cockatoos) match the grey-green foliage of the gum-trees, that even while one can hear them overhead, it is by no means easy to catch them with one's eye.

Some of the most interesting birds are purely nocturnal, and in the daylight even the large emu manages so effectually to hide itself that one seldom detects it in the bush or on the open

plain until one is almost on the top of it, when off it goes at a pace that a well-mounted horseman finds it difficult to beat. They possess three toes (ostriches have but two). I think we associate Australia chiefly with kangaroos and emus. The latter are easily domesticated, but are very powerful, and at certain seasons dangerous.

Strolling one day in a small paddock, where half a dozen were accustomed to be fed from my hand, and were usually most peaceable, to my surprise they all came running towards me in a threatening manner, looking very angry. I had forgotten—having been absent a little while—that it was their mating-time, and I suppose they mistook me for an intruder of their own species!

I slowly retreated backwards, but this did not pacify them, and they all simultaneously "went" for me with beaks and legs. The situation began to be serious, as there was no one near to help drive them off. Having a stout umbrella I contrived to open it suddenly, full in their faces, which considerably startled them and gave me a little time to get nearer the fence. But it was no good; they became still more furious, pounced upon my umbrella, and kicked it into shreds. In the meantime, however, I made my escape, with

my light coat torn to pieces, and some rather nasty knocks and bruises on arms and shoulders.

Next in size to the emu is the cassowary, a stupid, quarrelsome bird, which, like an emu, cannot fly. Its feathers resemble bristles, and its fleshy neck appendages are of vivid colours. Nobody seems to care for cassowaries. They look old enough and uncanny enough to have been denizens of the Ark. I notice that in the London Zoo people stop to look, in a pitying kind of way, at the aged and melancholy specimen there, with its broken helmet, as if it were some kind of outlandish antediluvian.

Luckily for the cassowary, its flesh is uneatable except by the aborigines, who, no doubt, sometimes make a meal of it, as they would of anything. So massive and strong is it, and so violent in the breeding season, that it is not a pleasant acquisition in an aviary. Emus and cassowaries think nothing of swallowing the strangest of articles, such as pieces of iron and glass, fragments of brick and leather, and other indigestible trifles. It is recorded that once an emu died from bolting a packet of tobacco—the only recorded instance of a bird patronising Irish "twist."

Turkeys, wild or native, and excellent to eat, are

CASSOWARY.

merely bustards. They afford capital sport, being "stalked" on horseback and shot as they rise on the wing.

Australia is a land of handsome eagles and eagle-hawks. Shepherds detest them, because of the inroads they make upon their lambs, whose delicate flesh these raptorials too much appreciate. They are, for their sins, condemned to be poisoned with arsenic—rather a pity from a sentimental point of view. I have often come across their nests, usually on the summit of lofty dead trees. They are immense, composed of as many twigs and branches as would fill a waggon.

The coasts, rivers, and lakes swarm with wild-fowl, including the graceful black swan, whose beak appears to have been dipped in red sealing-wax.

Then there is a most amusing and sociable bird, called the native-companion—a great crane, four feet high, and very useful in waging deadly war against insects. Like the rest of its family, it indulges in the most ridiculous dancing movements with its long legs and in eccentric twistings of its bill. It has, also, a nasty habit of darting its beak—a sharp and unerring weapon—at anything shiny, and thus bright-eyed children peering at them through the bars of aviaries have sometimes been deprived of their sight.

Cockatoos in their native fastnesses are interesting. But to get a chance of studying them you must set out very early in the morning, for they are intensely wary, and while taking their fill in a

BLACK SWAN.

field of Indian corn—of which they destroy much more than they eat—they place a sentinel on guard. If you can approach a flock without being seen, you will be amused by their play-

fulness and funny, discordant chatter. One would think that every topic of the antipodean day—the price of wool, the latest test match, the chances of much-needed rain, &c.—was under discussion, especially that of the continued and abhorred encroachment of man upon their domain, though as a matter of fact this would give them, as a satisfactory "set-off," a greater number of orchards and fields of grain.

There are several kinds of cockatoos. The great black, red-crested cockatoos, rarely seen in captivity; the sulphur-crested, the rose-coloured cockatoo, &c.—all alike in being noisy and tiresome, and in having beady black eyes devoid of any expression save that of astonishment. When they erect their crests they remind me of a dear old gentleman I once knew, who, whatever the nature of the news conveyed to him—a friend to see him, a fortune left him, his house on fire, or his dinner "served"—simply looked *astounded*, and said nothing. I christened him the "cockatoo."

That beautiful creature, the bower, or satin-bird, is seldom seen, though there is one in the Zoo. Its plumage is like glossy black satin. Hence its alternative name. In the light its feathers have a play of colour similar to that of the raven. This extraordinary bird builds itself a

kind of tunnel-nest and playground combined (one can be seen in the Regent's Park collection), and decorates it—it is composed of twigs—with feathers and any glittering thing it can get hold of.

The lyre-bird is well known, most travellers bringing home a set of the sixteen peculiar-formed tail-feathers, so like an ancient harp.

Many of the birds met with in the solitude and monotony of the interminable bush are of dull appearance; but cockatoos, parrots, piping-crows, and laughing-jackasses, are notable exceptions. These last-named—giant kingfishers of a lightish-brown, with blotches of pale blue on their wings—do not resort to water, and a fish diet is unknown to them. They live on snakes and other undesirable reptiles. At early morn, with the faintest glimmer of daylight, the stillness is broken by their extraordinary laughter, a kind of gurgling crescendo note, which greeting to the rising sun is given with such regularity that they have been called "the settler's clock."

These jackasses, with head-feathers erect, suggesting a woeful disregard of the amenities of brush and comb, sit, benevolent-looking and motionless, on some prominent branch, where with their short tails cocked up, they can be seen

by all, for they are fearless of man. There they sit, solemn as an assemblage of pawky Scotch elders, until, without any apparent reason, when one least expects it, they give vent to their most comical guffaw.

I don't thing the laughing jackass in our Zoo has ever indulged in a genuine laugh. Probably the keeper who has charge of him could tell us; but the jackass, no doubt, finds it no laughing matter to live in a country where, for nine months in the year, there is hardly a sun, worth calling a sun, to greet.

Moreporks (or mopokes), the Australian night-jars, who sleep all day and hunt all night, before retiring to rest help at the *matinées* I have referred to, reiterating their cry of "More pork" (though the boobook owl is said to enunciate these words still more clearly).

There are many legends concerning birds with eccentric cries, but the mythical history of more-porks I am not acquainted with. Perhaps, in ages past, they were a race of greedy children who, weary of a monotonous diet of mutton, were treated to roast pig, and became so persistent in their demands for "more," that Jupiter, in his wrath, changed them into night-jars, doomed to perpetually cry out for "more pork"!

Laughing jackasses in those distant ages were perhaps incessant perpetrators of bad puns and jokes, appreciated only by themselves, a nuisance to mankind, and punished accordingly.

Piping-crows may have been celebrated singers who, by reason of much success, became unbearably vain, and were thus humiliated.

No wonder the aborigines believe in ghosts, for as they sit by their fires after dark the bush is filled with mysterious sounds. High aloft, first in one place, then another, a species of curlew sobs in the most weird manner, while owls contribute their blood-curdling hoots, night animals grunt and squeak in startling fashion, and from the water-holes bull-frogs keep up an incessant accompaniment of deep croaking.

The morning concert, begun by the laughing-jackasses, is joined in by the leading tenors, the magpies or piping-crows, with their flute-like notes. They, like the jackasses, are strictly protected by law in Australia, though a boy would no more think of killing one than a youngster in England would think of destroying a robin redbreast. But the young birds are frequently captured, and make most charming pets when grown up.

Mrs. Magpie builds fearlessly, close to the

houses; but if any one goes too near her little home, down swoops Mr. Magpie in a great state of excitement, and so bold is he that I have seen him rush at a lady innocently riding by, and furiously peck at her hat.

Going up-country from Melbourne, on one occasion, I was asked by my host's daughter to bring her back some magpie nestlings. She was a very pretty girl, and, in a weak moment, I promised.

To obtain the young birds was easy enough; the difficulty was to rear them until they were old enough to cater for themselves. For more than a fortnight my life was rendered intolerable. I could go nowhere, attend to no business, because of my wretched charges; and as I could not trust them to the care of others, I realised the feeling of some poor, unaided mother hampered with twins and other young children.

I kept them in my bedroom, and every half-hour had to pop bits of raw meat down their gaping throats. The room opened on to a wide verandah, whence access to the orchard was easy. One night I heard the dogs barking, and knew that they had "treed" a 'possum. I had had strict orders from my host to shoot these 'possums whenever I could, because they consumed his

fruit. So I sallied out, gun in hand, and did the deadly deed.

When I returned, the birds were naturally wide awake, as the moon was shining through the open French windows, and awake they remained the rest of the night, and I went down to breakfast, a pale, haggard, worn-out man.

However, all things come to an end, even a magpie's babyhood! The birds grew up, could help themselves to food, and I took them to the metropolis of Victoria, where they were received, as the French say, with effusion. But alas! my care and watchful nursing was destined to have been bestowed in vain. Left to the tender mercies of an ignorant servant in her mistress's absence, they perished from thirst. The enlightened domestic had forgotten that water was a necessity for them—and so they went the way of most pets.

Australian magpies are born mimics, and can be taught to pipe simple tunes very correctly, but they invariably fail to learn the last note, for which they substitute their own enchanting whistle.

I had one of these birds, the most comical of its kind, and up to every trick. It would run away from me, and when I caught it up would

throw itself on its back and pretend to be dead while I tickled it. Jack could sing—

> "Merrily danced the Quaker's wife,
> And merrily danced the Quaker,"

splendidly, all but the final note. He was a good-tempered bird, and a universal favourite, and would never use his formidable, sharp beak, even under the dire provocation of being carried in people's arms like a kitten. No! after such an insult he would simply retire to some inaccessible place, and there spend an hour in straightening his sadly ruffled feathers.

Poor Jack! I had to take leave of him, and so fond of me had he become that I am sure, if he could, he would have shed tears when we said our last farewell.

The specimens of piping-crows we see in England are generally so dilapidated, especially about the tail-feathers, that strangers to Australia have little idea how attractive they really are in their black-and-white costume, though they lack the long tail of their English cousins, the magpies.

A bird that is a great nuisance to sportsmen in the bush is the spur-winged plover, called the alarm-bird, always alert, and, on the slightest

pretext, uttering its piercing cry, which, like that of the English jay, warns all the game round about.

Delightful beauties are parrakeets. Imagine a cloudless day, with the thermometer anything you like over 85 degrees, and, as you ride through the bush, perspiring at every pore, and envying the folk at home under their leaden-grey sky, you suddenly hear a scream from the gum-trees, whose heads tower one hundred feet above you, and a mass of vivid colour darts by like a flash of lightning! It is a flock of parrots and parrakeets. Presently, from the ground rise "bujerigars," known to us as "love-birds," pretty little things with tails as long as those of the pheasant, whom they are sometimes called after, their flesh having a gamey taste.

There are also green leeks (small parrots, good to eat), rosellas, and lories—all of the gayest plumage—haunting the gum-trees.

The white gum and the wattle (mimosa) in their full blossom, which bears a substratum of honey, are great favourites with parrots, every branch swarming with them.

Standing on one's head to read is nothing to the feats performed by these born gymnasts, who can feed upside down, holding on to a branch with

one claw, and are at ease in every conceivable attitude.

Pigeons are very numerous in Australasia, nearly one-half of the known species being found exclusively in that great continent and in the islands to the north of it. They range in size from the giant crowned-pigeon of New Guinea to the little turtle-dove, and include the well-known wonga-wonga and the terrestrial bronze-wing (the bronze only showing in certain lights), all of them excellent eating. The bronze-wing can travel sixty miles an hour.

Besides the birds I have mentioned, there are many lovely little creatures, some called after the English birds they are supposed to resemble. Robins there are, interesting and lively, with the orthodox red breasts, but with feeble voices. There are magpie-larks marked with black and white, whose cup-shaped nests of mud are beautifully built; fire-tails peculiar to Tasmania; native sparrows with red markings on their heads; the emu-wren, the queerest and most graceful mite, the tail decorated with five feathers absurdly long for its size; and fig-eaters, small, delicately shaped birds, somewhat resembling our chiff-chaff. These delight in ripe figs, whose inside they completely hollow out, leaving only the rind, but so intact

GIANT CROWNED PIGEON.

does the fig still look that it is only after the human fig-lover has gone to much trouble to get it from the top of the tree (which grows to a great size in Australia) that he finds, to his disgust, it is nothing but a hollow case.

Minahs—a kind of starling with a curious white frill at the back of their heads, giving them the appearance of having been badly shaved—have been introduced from India, and are to be seen in every town where there is grass, hunting for insects. Like starlings, they are noisy, lively, and amusing.

Sparrows, alas! have, like other British birds, been acclimatised, and curses loud and deep are bestowed upon the memory of the enthusiastic gentleman (I knew him well) who introduced these nuisances, the indictment against them being that they prefer cereals and the buds of fruit-trees to the insects they were brought over to destroy.

New Zealand has acclimatised many English birds, as it possesses few of its own, those few, however, being peculiar and wonderful. There is a handsome darkish parrot, with long and formidable beak which, though not less innocent-looking than most parrots, is an atrocious murderer. By some chance he, or one of his ancestors, dis-

covered, when hopping about, perhaps, at some slaughterhouse, that mutton fat and sheep's kidneys are good eating. Ever since, whenever he has the chance, he pounces upon a stray sheep, tears open its back, extracts the tit-bit and leaves the poor creature to die in agony. So the keah, or "kaka," as he is called (his name should be "wolf") finds every man's hand against him.

New Zealand is, ornithologically, a land of mystery. It owns the apteryx, a seeming "freak," with legs utterly disproportionate to its small body. It looks like a bloated woodcock or wingless curlew, and lays eggs of gigantic size.[1] Being strictly nocturnal, it is seldom seen, but if by chance run to earth in the day-time, its temper is roused, and it spits and scratches like a cat.

One other bird (though I have never known it in the flesh) I must mention before I have done with antipodean feathered life. I refer to the Moa, extinct (if indeed it be extinct) so recently that its bones have been discovered full of gelatine. Imagine yourself an ardent ornithologist, alone in the grand forests, surrounded by mountains covered with tree-ferns and giant pines, suddenly

[1] As large as a swan's.

confronted by a wingless bird, twelve feet high, looking like a three-toed ostrich with a large spur, and with legs thicker than those of a horse, who solemnly, in its own language, asks of you, "Where is that egg you have stolen from me?" the said egg being about 1 foot 3 inches long, with a capacity of over a gallon—*i.e.*, sixty-four times greater than that of a hen's egg. Yet this egg is small compared with that of its defunct relative, the epiornis of Madagascar, which held double the quantity.

An average fowl's egg, it may be observed, is 1 inch by $1\frac{1}{8}$ inch, and holds not quite half a gill!

CHAPTER VII

BIRDS OF THE WEST COAST OF SOUTH AMERICA

THE scene was off Callao, the chief port of Peru, and upon the gentle heave of the South Pacific Ocean a barque was drifting, rather than sailing, into the harbour after a thirty-days' voyage from New Zealand.

So fine had been the weather that Jack, after a little while, began to grumble (for sailors *must* grumble) at the everlastingly blue sky, with never a day of English Channel gloom and rain!

San Lorenzo, a barren volcanic island, shelters, like a great screen, the roadstead at Callao, making it almost safer than any other in that part of the world. As the barque slipped past the point whereon stands a lighthouse, so ingeniously placed that it cannot be seen until one is nearly on the top of it (verily, the "light that failed"),

the town opened up, and the sea sank into a dead calm.

It was a lovely sight. Dense strata of mist low-lying over sea and land, dissipated before the tropic sun.[1] Being early morning, long lines of pelicans flew past close to the water, making for their fishing grounds northwards and southwards, while small penguins incessantly popped up to the surface, to recover breath, before silently sinking down again to chase the fish swarming around.

In response to our signal, a green-painted tug-boat, resembling a Thames barge, and about as slow, came out too leisurely for our captain, for there was a current perceptibly drifting us on to the rocks of San Lorenzo, and unless the tug got alongside quickly he would have to let go the anchor in twenty fathoms, and heave it up again.

But all went well. A spasmodic, but providential, puff of wind kept the barque off the land, and, fastened to the *San Antonio*, we were safely brought to anchorage about a mile off the mole.

A short railway-journey took us to Lima, the capital, which I am not going to describe, beyond

[1] Lima is 11·50 south of the equator.

mentioning that the houses have flat roofs, and that a stream of water flows along the centre of all but the main thoroughfares.

There the first thing a lover of natural history notices is the strangely tame large birds sitting on these flat roofs in the most ridiculous attitudes, particularly if the weather be extra warm, when they extend their wings as though desirous of cooling themselves by letting in as much air as possible upon their bodies.

These domesticated wild-fowl are called in Spanish, *Gallinázas ;* in Indian, *Urubus ;* and in English, *Carrion Vultures*, or *Turkey-buzzards.* They are about the size of the noble Christmas bird, and, like it, their plumage is black and their necks bare and fleshy-red. But here the resemblance ceases, for the gallináza is not the kind of poultry to welcome on the festive-board with an accompaniment of chine or sausages! As a matter of fact, he is a scavenger, living on decomposed animal matter and refuse of all kinds. He is therefore most useful, and, as in the case of the Indian adjutant crane, a heavy fine is inflicted on any one who kills him. Thus, having acquired the rights of citizenship, and knowing himself protected by the arm of the law, he has become perfectly tame and confident.

Exploring the back streets of Lima early one morning, I saw these feathered scavengers at work. They were apparently indifferent to everything but the business upon which they were employed, until *a window opened!* At the sound, the gallinazás were instantly on the alert. A woman appeared, and, without the warning cry of "gardeloo" (as used in old Edinburgh), emptied into the street the accumulated house refuse [1] of the previous twenty-four hours, including two or three dead rats, a defunct cat, and a fowl in a "high" condition.

The gallinázas were now transformed into incarnations of liveliness. They swallowed the refuse and attacked the carcases, poor pussy being seized upon by a bird at each end, and was completely torn asunder. The rats were swallowed whole; while the fowl, being soft and tender from decomposition, was easily separated into half a dozen tit-bits. In ten minutes' time not a particle of insanitary matter remained in the road. The same process of "refuse-throwing" went on at intervals from most of the houses, until the birds were gorged and had to retire.

The Chinchas, 150 miles S.S.E. of Callao, was

[1] This was some years ago. Lima is now sanitated in up-to-date style, I believe.

the destination of the barque, there to load with guano for Liverpool. But Spanish "red-tape" ordained that the ship should sail past her destination on her way up from the south, to Callao, and thence beat back against the light trade-wind to the islands, and take in her cargo; the same formality of touching at Callao being required on the voyage home, a frightful waste of time and money.

At last we got away from Callao, and after three days of weary tacking, dropped anchor in very deep water off the principal, or Northern, island.

For centuries these islets, three in number, lying ten miles from the town of Pisco, on the mainland, in lat. 14·20 S., have been the resort of innumerable seals and sea-birds, the former crawling there to die. Their bodies, with those of sea-fowl, their eggs,[1] and excremated matter accumulating for centuries in this rainless climate, have gradually covered the bare rock and formed a mass averaging thirty feet deep, and rising into a peak[2] eighty feet thick at the summit.

[1] I was presented with an egg, discovered at a depth of forty feet, which had been resolved into ammonium oxalate urate with phosphorus.

[2] A small silver idol, evidently of ancient Peruvian origin was found some time ago at the base of this peak.

This is guano,[1] the famous fertiliser brought to the notice of European farmers in 1841, but used by the Peruvians ages ago, long before the Spaniards came into South America.

The Republic of Peru derived a large revenue from its sale (I use the past tense, because practically all the guano has been cleared off), and, being naturally desirous of encouraging the birds to remain in the vicinity of the islands and thus help to replenish it, they imposed a big fine upon any person killing them or, in fact, any other creature (except man!). In effect, the shooting of a bird or a seal on or near the Chinchas, was strictly prohibited, and if a gun was even innocently discharged on board a vessel at anchor, as likely as not a smart boat would put off, and, ascertaining who the culprit was, would arrest and fine him.

But neither the guard-house nor the guard-boat could be everywhere, and two of the islands—the Middle and the South—were almost deserted being not yet worked, and became my happy hunting-grounds regardless of regulations.

In those days I must have been somewhat audacious and defiant, as the following will show.

[1] *Huana* (dung) Peruvian. *Huano*, Spanish.

Within a few yards from the guard-house stood a rock, approachable only by water, and appropriated by a solitary pelican as a convenient resting-place. It was a splendid bird with black wings, bright-coloured hackle—blue, red, and yellow—and a fine tuft of upright feathers on its head. It was the biggest specimen I had ever seen, and inquiry elicited the fact that it had haunted the spot for years. So it was probably the oldest pelican on the islands.

I coveted that bird, and made up my mind to secure it. But how? I had no suitable ammunition, but I cut up some sheet-lead into slugs, and borrowing one of the ship's muskets and the ship's dinghy, went off with the cabin-boy, and silently rowed towards the unsuspecting patriarch.

We approached nearer and nearer, until within range, the pelican not taking the least notice of us. Boats passed him day after day at all hours, and did him no harm—why should he fear this one! "Bang!" went the musket, in the stillness sounding like the report of a small cannon reverberating from the cliffs. Down fell our victim, wounded unto death. A blow from an oar finished him, and we got back to the ship as quickly as we could with our prize.

Luckily it was a very hot day, and three o'clock

in the afternoon, an hour when most Spaniards take a siesta, so probably the guard did not hear the shot; but for hours afterwards we lived in fear and trembling, and whenever a boat put off from the landing-place we shivered. The bird was smuggled on board, for fear of the captain. It smelt terribly fishy, and we were glad enough, when the skinning operation was over, to fling away the carcass to the fishes.

Much astonishment was caused in the little town at the disappearance of so well-known an inhabitant, and I used to hear the skippers discussing it; but the cabin-boy and I kept our own counsel, and did not reveal the awful deed until the ship was clear of Peru on her voyage home.

For hours I used to watch the pelicans fishing round the islands, diving headlong from a great height with a splash whenever their sharp eyes detected a shoal of fish, and emerging from the water with their capacious pouches full of silvery mullet. Fish were everywhere, and no doubt this had always been the great attraction for seals and birds.

Numerous as were the pelicans, gannets outnumbered them. I recollect stalking one that was standing on the edge of a desolate part of the Middle Island, and putting a rifle-bullet through it,

when, to my astonishment, it flew off to cross the channel, which was about a mile wide and separated the Middle from the South Island. It winged its way strongly, but when half-way across it gave a sudden jerk, stopped short, and fell head over heels into the sea. It must have been pierced through the lungs or heart, and, like a "towering" partridge stricken in the head, the action of flying caused hæmorrhage which suddenly paralysed the life centres.

On this island I recklessly shot three galinázas, for which I might have been fined £30; but nobody saw me. With gun at full cock, I was strolling about, when a gallináza came sailing inquisitively, as though to ascertain if I were eatable. Now to a sportsman, when a bird floats above him within the range, the temptation to fire is irresistible.

I succumbed to the temptation, and down came the gallináza. Immediately two others came up, relatives I suppose, and peered first at the dear departed and then inquiringly at me. They had evidently never made the acquaintance of fire-arms. Again an evil spirit possessed me, and with a right and left shot they shared the fate of their friend. Three useful scavengers wantonly killed by a professed lover of birds! Then I examined them,

and was properly punished for my misdeeds. They *stank*, and their handsome plumage *swarmed with vermin !* In disgust, I pitched them over the cliffs, and returned to the ship a wiser man.

On the South Island were numerous small petrels, somewhat like skua gulls, living in burrows running deep in the dry guano. But when I put my arm into these burrows as far as it would go, to try to pull them out of their stronghold, they fought desperately, and their bite and scratch was no joke.

Beautiful terns—graceful performers on the wing—with red beaks, flicked about in every direction. Of land birds there were none ; at any rate, I did not come across any, and I doubt if, in the absence of vegetation, they could have existed.

How I escaped drowning, or being shipwrecked on the rocks, I don't know ! A friendly doctor, resident on the North Island, lent me his boat, seaworthy, but so small that there was room in her only for myself, and, perhaps, a big dog, or small boy. She was fitted with a leg-of-mutton sail, like the famous craft in which Robinson Crusoe escaped from Sallee, Morocco, with the faithful Xury.

In this cockle-shell I used to take lonely voyages, exploring the inlets, channels, and outlying rocks of the Chincha group, fishing, and

ever ready with gun for sea-fowl, and with rifle for the seals and sea-lions which swarmed. But as this book is supposed to be exclusively about birds, I must not dilate upon other matters, though I am sorely tempted to do so.

Being single-handed, it was no joke sailing up to some big rock where, perhaps, stood a row of penguins, and, putting the helm hard down (risking the boat drifting ashore), firing at the group, then lowering the sail and, with the oars, backing the little craft to the rock, jumping ashore, painter in hand, securing my prize, and jumping back again. Many a time I almost let go the rope. Had I done so the boat would have floated away, and I should have remained for a week, perhaps, before relief came, with no water to drink and nothing but shell-fish to eat. Once when the wind was rather strong (a rarity) I was very nearly done for, being driven helplessly towards the shore, and I had just taken off my coat preparatory for a swim, when the wind shifted, and I contrived to unship the mast and row out of danger.

It seems odd to think of penguins in the tropics. We generally associate them with antarctic regions, lonely, storm-swept islands, or on the mysterious, snow-covered continent around the South Pole, partly explored by Sir George Newnes's good ship,

PENGUIN.

Southern Cross, where the voyagers found king and emperor penguins, bulky travesties of birds. and wingless, the latter five feet high.

But all up the west coast of South America, probably because of the abundant fish life, small penguins (not unlike those of the Cape and South Africa) swarm, and may be seen standing on the rocks close to the water, into which they can dive in a second. They are neither shy nor suspicious on land, and are easily approached. Once in the water they are almost impossible to shoot, being quick as grebes, and diving at the flash of the gun

Like their big relations far south, the west-coast penguins have curious feathery head-ornaments, reminding one of Red Indians. They rejoice in white breasts, which they keep scrupulously clean ; their backs are black, and when seen from a distance standing bolt upright, they look exactly like little boys in white waistcoats. At sea (where they are often found far from land) they utter a strange, wailing cry, and many a mate, keeping watch in the small hours off the Falkland Islands, has mistaken it for the distressed cry of some poor fellow-mariner fallen overboard from a distant ship.

And now "to fresh woods and pastures new" in the River Plate—"pastures" in a very literal sense.

CHAPTER VIII

RIVER PLATE BIRDS

THE River Plate, or Argentina, as it is usually called, is veritably a land of pastures; a land covered with sheep and oxen sufficient to feed Britain year after year with ease.

Wherever the branches of the mighty Parana, and Uruguay, that form the Rio de la Plata, are large (which most of them are), a fringe of wood belts their courses, emerging wherefrom are rising hillocks, covered to the summit with pasturage clear of shrubs, the district being like the South Downs, but with black loamy soil, immensely fertile.

Beyond, the country is generally flat and open, or presents a monotonous succession of gentle undulations with here and there an isolated tree. In the spring, the grass is a vivid green, gemmed

with wild flowers, such as scarlet verbena, red, yellow, and blue clover, and white campanula. The cattle spread out in groups as far as the eye can reach ; while innumerable flocks of sheep are dotted over the ground ; and one realises that this is indeed a country of flocks and herds.

The first thing I noticed was the extraordinary tameness of most of the birds (except in spots where they had been much shot at by Englishmen), the natives rarely using a gun.

The isolated trees were full of small finches, miniature doves, linnets, and cardinal-birds ; the last-named looking most knowing with their red top-knots. They are of a playful disposition, and love a bit of fun, and they dodged me round and round a tree looking most impudent all the time. When I approached quite close, they slipped through the branches, and I believe would have repeated this process indefinitely rather than take the trouble to fly off to another tree ; though the neighbouring presence of hawks and eagles, ready to pounce upon them if they broke cover, might partly account for their conduct.

These raptorials are as fearless as the kites in India or the eagles in Tartary, where it is related that some travellers were once seated round a pot in which venison had been stewed,

EAGLE.

and were just about to partake of it, when they heard a noise overhead like the rushing of a storm, and a great bird dashed down, rising with a piece of meat in its claws, and simultaneously giving the cook a sound box on the ears with its outstretched wings.

I had no such experience in the River Plate, for there eagles get more than they want to eat, in the shape of young lambs and stray calves and foals. I narrowly escaped, however, being much hurt. I was out with a rifle, hoping for a shot at an ostrich or a deer, when a big eagle came and hovered around me. I fired, and brought it down with a broken wing. Having had little experience with eagles, I thought it was in a helpless condition, but, to make sure, I hit it, as it lay on its back, a heavy, and, I hoped, a mortal blow with the butt end of the rifle. In an instant it seized the weapon with its powerful talons, tore it from my hands wrenched the lock from the stock, and bent the hammer!

Looking at the creature's magnificent form, a model of compacted strength, I recalled Tennyson's lines—

> "He clasps the crag with hooked hands,
> Close to the sun in lonely lands
> Ring'd with the azure world he stands,

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls ;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunder-bolt he falls." [1]

As a matter of course my ambition was to become the possessor of an American ostrich shot by myself. There was a flock of about twenty in the *estáncia* (sheep and cattle-farm) where I was staying ; and, borrowing a horse, I set out for a ten-mile ride to the district frequented by them. They are not shy of men on horseback, being accustomed to them, but an individual on foot is an alarming object, while dogs are their pet aversion, and they will scour away at the sight of a puppy.

[1] The frontispiece of this book is a reproduction of Wolff's splendid drawing of golden eagles and eaglets executed for one of the, then, Marquis of Westminster's shooting-lodges. It is specially interesting because these noble birds are becoming rare in the Highlands, but one was captured in August, 1904, under extraordinary circumstances.

A farmer with his three assistants was getting in his sheep when they observed an apparently exhausted eagle flying heavily in their direction. On hurrying to the spot where it had alighted, they found that a steel trap was attached to one of its legs. Though unable to rise, the royal bird fought with desperate fury, using beak, wings, and its uninjured foot, but it was eventually secured. It was a very splendid specimen, and measured seven feet from tip to tip of its wings.

They are called rheas, and—as can be seen in the Zoo—resemble small ostriches, but have three, instead of two, toes. Like cattle, they browse on grass; they are of gentle disposition, and become so domesticated that they may often be seen in small and remote towns marching into the houses, making the tour of the rooms—generally all on the ground floor—and going back to their roosting-places at eventide.

However, to return to my hunt. Presently I came in sight of the flock, and had no difficulty in getting within reasonable distance. But firing a rifle from *terra-firma* is very different from doing so on horseback, as our men quickly found in the Boer War. It was useless, for as my steed cantered round them the barrel wobbled up and down, until in desperation I let fly anyhow, and, of course, missed.

The report startled the rheas, and they set off at a dignified, and what appeared to be, a moderate, run, which I thought would be easy to surpass. Not a bit of it! They let me get within a couple of hundred yards, and my horse, who was keen on the chase, did his best to close with them; but, without any apparent effort, the rheas glided ever so far away, paused, and looked back as much as to say, "What is the use of your attempting it!"

This performance was repeated, until both I and my horse were tired. So I dismounted, let the *broncho*[1] go (he needed no hobbling), and proceeded to stalk the flock. But it was no good. They had become suspicious, and made for the top of one of the hillocks whence they could see ever so far; so I never got nearer than five hundred yards of them, and though I blazed away with my old-fashioned rifle, all the ostriches lived to tell the tale.

As a rule, ostriches are ridden down by the *gauchos*, who circle round the flocks and secure them with the bolas,[2] or lasso; or they are chased straight on end by dogs and relays of horsemen.

I had been told that game was plentiful, and for once in a way, found the statement correct. No dog was required, nor any special precaution, when approaching a likely looking creek or swampy bottom. The snipe lay close until almost stepped upon, when not one only, but *clouds* would rise and take flight in their peculiar fashion to another marsh. They were almost too numerous, for it was difficult to decide which to fire at,

[1] Horse of Spanish descent.

[2] Balls attached to each end of a line, which is thrown so as to entangle the animal struck.

and the best sport was when they rose singly. It was all very exciting, for any kind of bird might get up; and the solitude, and the sense of being in a wild, uncultivated country added to the fascination.

In the isolated pools were any number of ducks, which had to be approached cautiously, there being not an atom of cover; so I used to ride close by, slip off the horse, hobble him, crawl flat along the ground, and let fly into the thick of them, when a brace or two would succumb; the rest, rising from the water, would circle round and round for some minutes, and return close to the pool. This was my opportunity, and as the birds descended splendid flying shots were obtained. The process might have gone on indefinitely, as they always returned to the same spot, and had it been the days of breech-loaders, I could have denuded the pond of duck and teal. As it was, I used often to fill a sack with them, and my horse had always a heavy load to carry home.

Partridge-shooting in the River Plate is different from that sport at home in stubble or turnips, or at a drive. In the first place, the bird is only *allied* to the true partridge; it is a tinamou, a class peculiar to South America. There are two kinds, the large and the small bird, the latter being

about the size of a partridge. The large bird resembles a tailless hen pheasant with a speckled crest. I saw one recently in a Jermyn Street

TINAMOU.

poulterer's shop; it had, evidently, been acclimatised amongst pheasants, and, as such, had been shot in a battue.

Both large and small tinamous (good to eat, by the by) possess an invincible repugnance to rise on the wing. When approached, they will run swiftly hundreds of yards and squat behind a tuft of grass that apparently could not conceal a mouse, and there remain invisible until you walk quickly up, when again they scuttle away. The large bird will almost let you kick it, rather than fly, so lazy is it, and when it does get off the ground, moves sluggishly in a straight line and drops as soon as it conveniently can.

The *guacho's* children, at a very early age, walk up to the tinamous and practise their miniature lassoes upon them. They can also easily be taken by riding round them in ever-narrowing circles until they become mesmerised, when they can be killed by a whip-stroke.

The amazement of the *guachos* when they saw me shoot a brace of these birds on the wing was unbounded; and they could never understand why powder and shot should be wasted in killing game in that fashion, when it could be knocked on the head with a stick.

Following the course of the great rivers, gulls (though far from the sea) abounded, and other water-fowl, cormorants, tern, and the like.

Spur-winged plovers were everywhere, nuisances as usual, their cries setting everything far and near on the *qui-vive*. They are called teros-teros, from their tiresome iteration of these words. These blessed creatures invariably gave warning of my vicinity, and prevented my approaching the equally noisy chaja, or crested screamer, which in my rambles I used to see sitting on trees, ever watchful lest man should come too near. They are fairly big birds—about the size of a turkey—with a crest of feathers on the back of the head and a strong spur on the shoulder of each wing. Their note resembles their Spanish name, and is intensely irritating. However, they are not combative birds, but inoffensive, easily domesticated, and even benevolent, for when tamed they are often left in charge of poultry, which they accompany on their expeditions and bring back at night to their roosts, fiercely attacking and driving off any hawks that might venture to steal a chicken or duckling.

And here I must record the sin of my bird experiences, for which may the rook who, as parson, read the burial service over "poor cock robin" assoil me. *I slew an owl!*—inadvertently, it is true; but, all the same, I slew him—one of the most fascinating little creatures imaginable.

SCREAMER.

In the excitement of exploring a new country and disturbing unfamiliar birds, a gunner's first impulse is to shoot, without stopping to think what kind of bird he is firing at. Thus, one day, when out after partridges, something rose that appeared to be a quail, though it did not fly like one. Down it came, and I went towards it. Alas! lying on its back in its death-throes, a beseeching, reproachful look in its large eyes, was a delightful owl, no bigger than a blackbird!

I was much distressed, and tried to comfort myself by finding excuses for the tragedy. It being daylight, he ought, I reasoned, to have been snug in his burrow; for in that treeless land, he, like his cousin, the prairie owl of North America, makes his home in the ground, or, rather, shares it with some burrowing animal. How should I, accustomed to find owls in church towers or ruins, expect one to get up from the ground like a woodcock! He ought to have stayed indoors until the night. He must have had a tiff with his wife, and have hopped out until the tiff blew over, and thus met with his fate.

But I found that my little dead friend was the pampas sparrow-owl, which is not strictly nocturnal, but loves the sunlight, and is often out at midday. A blow to my life-long reverence for the

owl-tribe was dealt me by my host, who declared that this particular kind of owl had strongly marked bloodthirsty propensities, and was in the habit of sneaking into the poultry enclosures, slipping under the wings of the hens, and tearing open their sides. But I have never forgiven myself for killing one of my most favourite birds; and, the mail steamer for the north sailing in a week, I booked my passage, and, in a fit of remorse, left Argentina for Brazil.

J. B DAWES,
LENDING
LIBRARY
HEATH.

CHAPTER IX

BRAZILIAN BIRDS

ENTERING Rio harbour—the most beautiful in the world—there were few indications of birds (except gannets), and nothing to show we were approaching a feathered paradise; a vast country of wide-spreading forests and innumerable rivers, an ideal spot for birds, of which there is a greater variety to be found than in any place on earth.

The Brazilians are a kindly people, and every family has its pet birds, which accounts for the multitude of cages and birds in all the market-places up and down the coast from Rio to Para.

My host was a naturalist, and in his beautiful garden, not far from Rio, I hoped to have a good opportunity of once more studying tropical bird-life. At first, however, I feared I was doomed to disappointment, so few birds were about, and one day, in my eagerness, I actually mistook a gigantic

daylight moth (seven inches across the wing) for a bird! But my hopes before long were abundantly realised.

I doubt if my readers have ever seen humming-birds alive. Many have gone into raptures over the splendid Gould collection in the London Natural History Museum; but, beautifully preserved as they are, the perfect brilliancy of plumage has in many cases departed. One advantage, however, they possess—they are *at rest*, and thus the exquisite colouring can be studied.

Standing in my host's garden near a fine bread-fruit tree, my eye suddenly rested upon what looked like a piece of emerald and sapphire jewellery. Approaching it I found it was a mother humming-bird sitting on the smallest nest I had ever seen, and the piece of jewellery flashing in the sun was her back! She was not in the least afraid, and let me come quite close, merely turning her graceful little neck and slender beak to have a better look at me with her diminutive but piercing eye. I had not watched her a minute, in silent admiration, before there was a hiss, and out of a bush close by darted what appeared for the moment to be a flame of fire, which hovered about me with wings vibrating so rapidly as to become invisible, while producing

LONG-TAILED HUMMING-BIRD.

a distinct whirring or humming sound. It was her mate who thus came unpleasantly near my eyes with his needle-like bill, but recognising that I meant no harm, cooled down and perched by the side of his mate. I was lost in admiration of his superb beauty. He was about the size of a very large dragon-fly, but mere words can convey no idea of the glorious combination of the colours of his feathers. As Waterton, the great naturalist, has said, "Let the young naturalist imagine blue, white, red, yellow, green, crimson, lake, and purple, with all the intermediate shades, blended into each other, producing a most fascinating effect, and then he will form a faint idea of the transcendent beauty which adorns the plumage of these living gems."

I could write a book exclusively on these "living gems"; but here I can only glance at the subject.

Their nests are no bigger than half a small apple, and are made of moss neatly thatched with lichens and lined with cotton from the silk-cotton tree. The eggs—generally two—are white and the size of large peas. The nestlings emerge on the scale of a blue-bottle, and, it is said, only require a week to develop flying powers. As their legs do not admit of a sitting posture, it follows that

they are never seen in that position; but when not whirring about, they perch on the branches of trees very much after the manner of kingfishers, until they see something that strikes their fancy, when away they dart like a flash of light. Pugnacious and brave to a degree are the males, and battles fierce, if brief, rage whenever their jealousy is aroused. As Captain Burton observed, "Their little bodies contain mighty powers of love and hate; they fight as furiously as they woo." Their food is not honey or nectar, but principally the minute insects found in the calixes of flowers, a favourite being the scarlet blossom of the Bois Immortel, or trumpet-flower tree.

My friend's garden, enchanting in its vegetation though it was, attracted comparatively few birds. They were to be found further away from cities, and up-country I travelled in search of them.

One domestic pet I had almost forgotten to mention, though found in nearly every house in Brazil—the ardea helios, a miniature heron of exquisitely graceful shape and bearing, its feathers variegated minutely with bars and specks of several colours such as are seen on certain moths. The Brazilians call it pavão (peacock). It is the dearest little thing imaginable and becomes per-

fectly tame, walking about the floor with much gracefulness, catching the flies that swarm, gently flicking them up with its long, slender beak. Its call is a soft, long-drawn whistle. It answers to its name, and lets children pat its back, and will take an insect from their hands, but it is more chary with adults. In its wild state it lurks in the densest thickets, and is seldom seen.

The "forest primæval!" Not a bit like Longfellow's "In Arcadia," where—

> ". . . The murmuring pines and the hemlock
> Bearded with moss and in garments green indistinct in the twilight,
> Stand like Druids of old."

The forests of tropical South America are most impressive in their solitude and in the size of their trees. The sun rises abruptly as it sets, without preliminary dawn. Night, when countless fireflies glitter, passes, and the nocturnal birds with their weird cries, and the jaguar with his muffled roar, go home to bed. The most intense silence prevails, as if all nature were in suspense. Then the east suddenly becomes flushed with a rosy glow that deepens into crimson, and the sun's rays light up the polished tree-stems. Insect-life awakens with strange and faint chirpings; the

birds gently twitter as though only half awake; the sun mounts a little higher—and another day in the Tropic of Capricorn leaps into being.

So closely do the mighty trees grow here that they seem to be struggling to get a breath of air and sunshine. Their bareness (for they are somewhat branchless until near the top) is compensated for by the parasites and shiny-leaved climbers (lianas) that twine round the trunks and climb to the summit, whence they hang down like ship's cables. On the branches of the trees are many beautiful ferns and orchidaceous plants. Palms of great height, as one might expect, are all around. There is no monotony in the vegetation, and, generally speaking, the foliage varies from the most delicate to the most massive kind, and in colour from the lightest to the darkest shades.

Mimosas with fragrant flowers are met with at every turn. Great tree-ferns; tufts of vividly green bamboo canes, clanging in the breeze; handsome convolvuluses; bignonias, or trumpet-flowers; grenadillas (passion-flowers), with blossoms of variegated colours and fragrant smell; papilionaceous plants, with butterfly-like blossoms and delicious perfume; silk-cotton trees; and often wild orange-trees, covered simultaneously with bloom and fruit (both green and ripe); coffee-

bushes, looking not unlike laurels—all these help to make up a tropical forest. But few birds are to be seen, unless you know when and where to look for them, so vast is the area. Many of them migrate, and others are attracted by certain trees only when in blossom or when fruit-bearing ; then they eat their fill and go off to some other tree, perhaps miles away. Thus one day you may come suddenly upon flocks of birds, and the next there is not one to be seen.

One day I met that strange creature, the toucan. Strolling early one morning in some partly cleared forest land, I was attracted by a big tree that had fallen, and had remained at an angle supported by its neighbours, and was covered with long moss, which gave it the appearance of some old, bearded giant who could not stand upright. Suddenly there was a loud chattering, and a troop of bright-coloured birds from the forest depths alighted on this tree. They leaped from limb to limb with more agility than grace, keeping up an incessant conversation until, presumably having settled their plans for the day, they flew clumsily away, uttering the most piercing screams when they detected my presence.

These were toucans—surely, with the exception of the Asiatic hornbills, the oddest-looking birds

J. B. DAWES, PENOHEATH
LENDING
LIBRARY
NEATH

in existence, their beak (seven inches long by two inches wide) utterly out of proportion to their bodies. Their breast-feathers were brilliant orange, deep rose, and chrome. Like the woodpeckers, they are climbers, and have two convenient claws, before and behind their feet. In profile, toucans look absurdly like Jewish patriarchs. Their beak, which sometimes resembles a lobster's claw (though apparently ill-adapted for feeding), is a most wonderful contrivance, being composed of spongy cells, and very light; and as fruit (the toucan's favourite food) is generally found in the tropics at the extremity of the branches, and as—unlike other birds that hover—it could not obtain the tempting morsel with an ordinary beak, the Almighty, in His wisdom, has provided it with a "beak-hand," which enables it, as it hops along almost to the extreme tips of the branch, to bend over, and, without losing its balance, nip off the fruit.

Macaws were always a source of admiration and wonder to me, especially the splendid Hyacinthine, three feet in length, including the tail, and of a soft Cambridge-blue colour. They are sociable creatures, like all the parrot-tribe, and feed in flocks, cracking the hardest of nuts, as any one can see for himself at the Zoo, where there used

to be a beautiful specimen. A very striking looking macaw is the scarlet and blue bird, which, when seen in numbers, looks like a group of royal standards.

Parrots of all kinds (most of them green) were to be seen at every turn, some with hoods of red and blue feathers which could be raised at will; while all the parrakeets were lovely, green being their predominant colouring.

But I must "hurry up," or I shall be accused of prosing at undue length about this fine bird country.

A curious Brazilian is the umbrella-bird, the size and colour of a raven, with a remarkable crest of very thick feathers two inches long, that can be flattened so as to become invisible, or spread out over the beak like an umbrella or the thatch of a hut. Below the beak there hangs from the neck a feathery cravat, like a sporran. It loves the margins of rivers, feeds on fruit, and has a deep note. So the Indians call it the trumpet bird.

Of all uncanny notes, that of the uruponga, or bell-bird, is the strangest; it is also called the campanero (tolling), because it can be heard, like a convent-bell at midday, in the silence of the woods.

Seldom are the campaneros seen. They sit in flocks on the thick tops of lofty trees, and take flight at the least alarm. They are about the size of a blackbird, and are pure white; from the base of the upper mandible springs a flexible, fleshy horn, three inches long, which hangs over the head like a turkey-cock's. In stuffed specimens this is often made to look like a rhinoceros's horn, which is a mistake.

The Almighty—speaking reverently—seems to have made certain animals and birds in a spirit of fun, or, at least, in a sportive mood. If the toucan and hornbill excel other birds in size of beak, certainly the boat-bill of Brazil excels every other (unless it be the pelican) in proportionate width of mouth, which bears the same resemblance to that of the slender-billed crane and heron, &c., as an eight-oared racing craft does to a barge. It is not unlike two hooked spoons set one against the other, and one understands how the boat-bill can swallow fish without preliminary process of dismemberment, though why it should require such a capacious storehouse, considering it is always near rivers abounding in fish and molluscs, is hard to explain.

Not very far from the city of Para, at the mouth of the mighty River Amazon, I stumbled upon a

BOAT-BILL.

lake formed by the overflow of the river. It was surrounded by trees, and as I silently emerged from the dense thicket a wonderful sight was revealed. The pool—for such it was regarded in that land of great inland waters—swarmed with wild-fowl, whose quackings had prepared me for their presence. Birds were everywhere—in the air, the water, and the trees. Soaring above were eagles and vultures on the look-out for prey, and a magnificent harpy eagle sat on the topmost branch of the loftiest tree, taking stock of the proceedings below. Kites and hawks hovered within easy striking distance of anything they coveted on the water. Long-tailed trogons, resplendent with soft plumage glistening with many hues, sat rather sulkily and stolidly, not moving an inch.

Birds exactly like African wydahs flitted gaily about, and South American love-birds—green, with blue inner wings and short tails—twisted about in couples round the blossom-bearing branches.

Little tanagers with black, scarlet, and green feathers, hopped about like gaudy sparrows, amongst them being the exquisite seven-coloured kind.

Macaws, toucans, and parrots clambered up and

down the trees and clung to the branches in every possible and impossible attitude.

The tyrant-shrike, perched upon the tops of the bushes, now and again pouncing down upon its insect prey, and continually twittering as if in derision of the chatterers whose note could be heard from the dense thicket.

Orioles flitted around, with feathers yellow, red, and black, their curious purse or bottle-shaped nests suspended from the branches that hung over the water.

Kingfishers of all sizes solemnly watched for fish to come their way; while the tap-tap of woodpeckers reminded one of the woods at home and the well-known English song.

Exquisite egrets, with white shoulder plumes gently waving in the imperceptible breeze, stood at the water's edge, ignorant of how much their ornaments are prized by ladies; and herons kept them company in rows, like soldiers.

Ducks sported above and below the surface of the water; and a duckling having got separated from its parent and become entangled in some weeds, down swooped a kite and bore it away in its claws before the frantic mother could utter a heart-broken quack.

Jacanas—something like coots, with long legs

and longer claws—stole over the huge Victoria Regia leaves so lightly that they did not bend. While on the bank I espied the first boat-bill I had ever seen. He was no bigger than a large fowl; his wings were short and his legs sturdy, and a strikingly handsome crest hung down behind his head, producing a benevolent expression, to which his huge, shining beak added. He looked like some well-groomed, philanthropic old gentlemen. Presently he caught sight of a pretty big fish close by, and in a moment he was upon it and gulped the poor unfortunate down head first. But where the enjoyment came in is hard to imagine. Certainly birds are not epicures!

Without disturbing matters I glided away. And thus we must leave this Bird Paradise, which all bird-loving boys, I am sure, must long to visit. I know I shall never forget Brazil, and in the dull and chilly months of our dear old England I often look back with longing for another glimpse of that beautiful scene by the pool, with its rain-cleared atmosphere and August temperature.

CHAPTER X

CORNISH BIRDS

DIRECTLY the train crosses the Tamar on Brunel's bridge, and leaves Devonshire behind, a stranger to the West of England realises that he is in a county different from every other. Even the names of places have a distinct character of their own. "By *Pol*, *Tre*, and *Pen*, you shall know the Cornishmen," says the old rhyme, and this is equally true of Cornish localities — Tregenna, Polcurno, and Penzance, &c., while such names as are not of this class are romantically unfamiliar—Menheniot, Lostwithiel, Redruth, and so forth. Saints of outlandish designation appear to have been selected as patrons of the little churches, of which there are many, especially in the Liskeard district—St. Gluvias, St. Mawe, St. Loy, St. Buryan, St. Day ; though who the last saint was I have never been able to determine.

Leaving London on a miserable December day, intending to break the journey at Plymouth, one of our party impulsively wired to the hotel manager to keep up a good fire in the sitting-room, but in the course of our journey the temperature completely changed, and when we found awaiting us not merely a good fire, but a roaring furnace, we unanimously resolved to have it extinguished. The air was unspeakably soft and balmy, and softer still the following evening, as the train wound like a serpent along the coast, towards King Arthur's realm of Lyonesse, sometimes within sight of the sea, sometimes behind ridges that concealed it, but never far away from it, and when, in the morning, we stepped into the garden of the Falmouth Hotel, a vision of beauty lay before us.

The sea-scape was wide, framed in picturesque cliffs with headlands jutting out to the right as far as the Manacle Rock, the breaking waves sparkling like silver. Remember, it was near Christmas, yet the sky was perfectly clear, the sun was warm, and the air most deliciously soothing and exhilarating.

And this delightful climate is to be had within 312 miles of Paddington! Climatologists tell us that its mildness is owing to the west wind which

is constantly arriving there, warmed by three thousand miles of Gulf Stream, and also to the attenuated stream itself, which, on its way north, impinges upon sea-girt West Cornwall.

No wonder it is beloved by birds. In fact, the very lay of the land conduces to this, for though, broadly speaking, Cornwall consists of bare central ridges devoted to mining, and deserted engine-houses, it has a magnificently indented coast, affording harbours for feathered creatures as well as for brave ships. In its sheltered valleys, or chines, vegetation flourishes; trees, though somewhat stunted, grow thickly; bushes and sheltering granite boulders abound on the heath-land, and even on the wind-blown plateau of the Lizard Downs the broad stone hedges are covered with protecting foliage. The creek and river banks are edged with oak and ash, and the exposed coves facing the Channel are always clothed with something green.

In short, there is any amount of shelter for every kind of bird. Foreign wayfarers on the high seas, as well as the regular migrants, pitch here to recruit after their battle with the winds; while bitter weather brings wild-fowl and rare sea-birds.

One never knows what bird may turn up after

a gale—it might be a snowy owl, a golden oriole, a Bohemian wax-wing, a hoopoe, a great white heron, a white spoonbill, or even a glossy ibis, a Sabines gull, the ivory gull, or the rare Buonaparte's gull. To the ornithologist it is a new world, and he could believe that he had left England behind him at Plymouth. He begins to despise common bird-life, and looks only for rarities.

Winter in Cornwall, as often as not, passes without intense cold. But occasionally a north-east gale sets in with extraordinary fierceness, and drives all the wild-fowl into harbours and sheltered bays, instinctively flying up wind lest they should be forced out to sea. Then is the gunner's opportunity, though it seems rather mean to take advantage of the poor bird's difficulties. But compassion is at a discount when there is a chance of bagging a rare specimen.

On such occasions I used to go out in a launch, and determinedly steam against the furious blast whose icy breath beat down the waves and froze the moisture on beard and moustache. To leave the harbour was impossible, but we could explore its creeks. See far we could not, because of the blinding spray, but some eye, keener than the rest, would detect a group of ducks squatting

close together and right ahead, where they would sit until the steamer was almost upon them, when they would painfully rise and try to fly to windward, but not before toll had been taken and their number considerably diminished. The launch would then carefully manœuvre to pick them up.

In this way were obtained ducks not easily approached in ordinary weather—pintails, shovellers, scoters, and even the rare turf-scoter, pochards, golden-eyes, and the tufted-duck, hard to shoot and a most expert diver, but becoming paralysed and stupified by cold.

Steam-launches were luxuries, and not always to be had, so I purchased a small boat, and appointing a time-expired Royal Navy A.B. as chief officer, I sailed up and down the harbour and coast to my heart's content, and the Chincha Island's adventurous days came back to mind.

Well-provisioned, we used to start early in the morning, and, if there was no breeze, we rowed for the Black Rock, marked by a tall iron beacon, standing like a sentinel at the mouth of Falmouth's beautiful harbour, and sailed to the open Channel beyond.

It was off this rock that I scored an ornithological success, rather to the disgust, I believe,

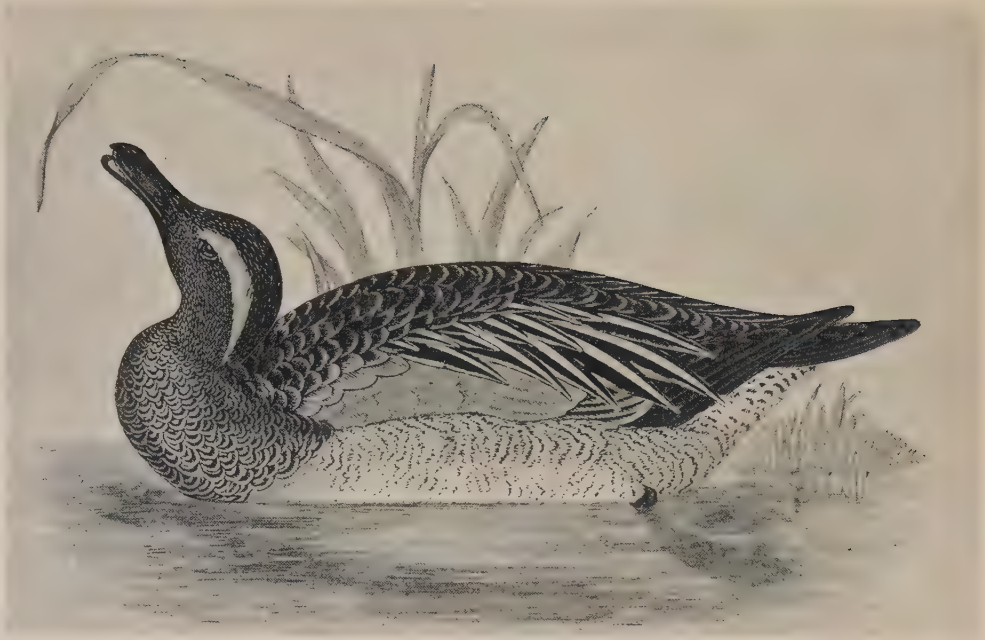
of a local collector, who, though long resident, never had such luck.

A strange-looking dirty white gull had been seen for days hovering about the shore, though well out of range. I tried, but could not get near enough. I had forgotten all about him, when one day he appeared in the harbour-mouth. Fortunately there was some fat pork on board for lure, so I tossed some out. The gull, too hungry to be cautious, flew right overhead, and in a second was floating dead on the water.

To my delight he was identified as an Iceland gull, a variety of which only a few have been seen in that part of Cornwall. He was not dirty white, as we had thought, but of a light broccoli hue, with arrow-headed bars on the back, and was almost a mature bird.

All kinds of gulls frequent the harbour—the greater and lesser black-back, kittiwakes, the (by no means common) gull, the black-headed or laughing-gull, the skua occasionally, and the herring-gull. Terns are not so common, but now and again the lesser tern—smallest of its kind—and, very rarely, the lovely roseate tern which nests in the Scilly Islands, are seen.

One of my favourite excursions was to the Helford River, a lovely estuary leading up to a



GARGANEY TEAL.

stream rising in the upland moors. Here was sport indeed. Habitations were few, and no one as a rule to be seen except the oyster and mussel gatherers. Narrow branches of the estuary ran inland for miles, walled in by rocks and woods to the water's edge.

Sail taken in, we used to row cautiously round each point many times, finding on the farther side ducks sitting on the rocks in fancied security. Some were true mallards, others garganey teal (by no means common in the locality), pintails, and widgeon, but I think the majority were pochards.

There were a great many dab-chicks about. These cunning lesser grebe dived at the flash of the gun, and vanished, presently coming to the surface with nothing but their short beaks showing just above the water, until danger was passed.

Their cousins, the rarer Sclavonian, and great crested grebes, we also saw, but a hard hunt ensued if the first shot was not fatal. We then had to chase them, rowing for all we were worth, they generally getting clear away, and refusing to rise on the wing, until we got tired out.

However, we managed to secure one or two specimens, in lustrous full plumage; their breasts glistening like polished silver, and eyes that even in death resembled rubies.

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER.

But the greatest fun was in chasing the divers—the Great Northern, black-throat, and red-throat—that had strayed up the Helford River after the sprats that abounded. All three swim and dive equally well, but the Great Northern can keep under water for apparently an indefinite time, reappearing in the quarter where one least expected them, and out of range. The only chance of securing them was by sailing up to them. Then they take to the wing, head to wind, and can be brought down, but the fire-arm must be a long, heavy duck-gun, such as I always used, with good propelling force, and loaded with pretty large shot, No. 3.

I once, by sheer luck, killed a magnificent Great-Northern diver, at fully seventy yards distant, one pellet only passing through its neck. I don't know which of the three divers is the handsomest in full spring plumage. The biggest bird is beautifully barred on the back in black and white, and has a black throat. The black-throated diver is smaller; it has similar black markings, and its throat is ebony colour all over. The red-throated diver is about the same size, with a speckled back, a bill of deep blue, and a brilliant red patch on the throat. All three have snowy-white breasts.

BLACK-THROATED DIVER.

I used, at great risk, to sail in bad weather at the mouth of the Helford River, chasing these noble birds, whose speed exceeds that of a four-oared cutter. Once we should certainly have capsized had not the mast snapped short off.

Sometimes, on the distant mud-flat, we came upon a flock of wild geese, and at once tried to get near them. They were always too wary for us, and though, by letting the boat drift down, we managed to reduced the distance between us to only eighty yards or so, I suppose they scented us, for they invariably went off, while our revengeful shot at the retreating host was futile.

Sneaking close to the rocks we often spied mergansers and goosanders, like ducks, but *not* ducks, with peculiar saw-like bills, and quite uneatable and difficult to kill.

As for teals, we often, when walking up the rivulet banks, bagged a dozen of these delightfully palateable little ducks in an hour.

At the head of the Helford River, in narrow creeks, I occasionally spotted, on a tree over-hanging the water, a kingfisher intently on the look-out for small fish. I suppose in those days I was somewhat thoughtless, for whenever I had the chance I shot them, until my kind-hearted Quaker

friend begged me in future to spare these most interesting and most brightly coloured of British birds, against whose lives every ignorant gunner raises his hand.

When wind and weather permitted, the

MERGANSER.

Manacles were my objective—a long sail from the harbour, and difficult because of the strong counter-tides along the indented coast. At the time I am speaking of, the only warning to mariners against these dreaded off-shore rocks (of

GUILLEMOT.

recent years the scene of several terrible shipwrecks) was the melancholy tolling of a bell-buoy[1] moored in deep water, which could be heard at all times and in all weathers, for even in calms there is an uncomfortable heave of the wild waters around the rocks. Oftentimes I used to steer alongside, and, squeezing between the bars of the cage which enclosed the bell, enjoy the queer sensation.

Safely at anchor off the inshore Manacle Rocks, I would await the flight of sea-birds winging their way westward towards the Lizard Head. Looking to the east, not a bird could be seen, until presently a black line would spring up just above the tops of the waves and make straight for the boat. It would come tearing up wind like an express train, and when close to us resolve itself into a string of puffins, guillemots, razor-bills (or auks). Aiming at the leader, two or three of the hindmost would fall. It was wildly exciting, for the stream of birds was inexhaustible, though the number in each flight varied from two or three, to thirty or forty.

In certain kind of weather gannets hovered above us, attracted by shoals of pilchards, and

[1] A lighthouse, or beacon, is now being contemplated by Trinity House.

RINGED GUILLEMOT.

came to grief from sheer indifference to our presence. But we saw something beside birds. One beautiful day, while we were refreshing the inner man, I heard a sort of cough close by, which could not have proceeded from my chief officer. I had my face to the shore, and gun at full cock by my side, and looking up, I saw a splendid dog otter making straight towards the boat, which he had not observed, never anticipating one at this solitary spot. Noiselessly raising my long gun, I fired at his head, startling my old sailor (who was sitting with his back to me) nearly out of his wits. The otter gave a convulsive tumble, and, to my disgust—for his skin was a perfect one—sank to the bottom.

Eagerly we peered into the depths of the clear water, where long seaweed waved to and fro like the tresses of a band of mermaids, but we saw him no more.

There was some wild talk on my part of diving; but this the chief officer discountenanced, telling me that I should be caught in the weeds and that otters, when badly wounded, generally sink to the bottom and firmly grip something with their jaws, which remain locked after death.

Cormorants and shags are busy fishing all the year round in every bay and creek in Cornwall,

RINGED PLOVER.

seldom going far to sea even in calm weather, their favourite food—flat-fish and eels—not being found so readily in deep water. Their appetite is enormous and their digestion astounding. Frank Buckland declares that the head of a large fish (they swallow their prey head first) is usually digested before the remainder slips down!

In spring the plumage of both the cormorant and the shag is most beautiful, though at a distance it simply appears black. That of the cormorant is of a metallic, very dark blue colour; above its legs on each side is a white patch, which fishermen calls its "watch."

The shag is smaller, and its prevailing colour is a beautiful, glossy, dark green, whence it derives its alternative name, Green Cormorant. As shags float low in the water, like submarines, with their snake-like necks aloft, shots can be had at them from the boat or from the shore; but, like other diving birds, if not hit, or if only wounded, they disappear, and lead one a pretty chase. Being fond of sitting in groups on some particular rock, to clean their feathers or to rest with wings outstretched in the sun, the best way to secure one is to sail slowly up to the rock, keeping out of sight behind the sail, and, when within range, to alter the boat's course. Before they can recover

REDSHANK.

from their astonishment at the sight of suddenly revealed humanity, and escape by flying or by launching into the water, the selected bird can be picked off.

Both rock and tidal shore abound with waders such as oyster-catchers, turnstones, dunlins, sandpipers, and purple sandpipers (the latter always on rocks), ring-plovers, red-shanks, and so on; charming, but wary little birds, most of them extremely sociable, going about in flocks, and requiring great caution in stalking. The cry made by these waders and by curlews at night as they flit to new quarters, is like the wail of an infant in distress.

In gales of wind, with curling sea tumbling grandly into Falmouth Bay, wild-fowl, driven off distant lands, are often washed in, exhausted and helpless. Strolling on the beach one stormy morning, I saw, with my glasses, a bird some distance off being carried towards the shore. Slowly it approached with the tide, and at last was flung at my feet. It was a fine, red-throated diver, in a starving and dying condition.

The same morning, a little later, when the wind had become more furious, I all but caught a wren! It was literally hurled by the blast into a small bush on the narrow cliff pathway, and, rushing for-

RED-THROATED DIVER.

ward, I just missed it. In that terrific gale the poor little thing—a mere ball of feathers, it looked like—could not fly a yard, but it contrived to slip away like a mouse.

I was destined to be in luck, for in the afternoon, watching the rollers break in Pennance Cove, a lovely gull, no bigger than a tern, kept hovering over the water, not far from land. I could see it was a rare kind, so patiently waiting for it to come near, it fell to my shot, but pitched into the waves thirty yards from the shore. Was the tide on the turn? A moment of suspense, and I found there was just enough flood left to drift the gull nearer and nearer. When about twelve feet away, it stopped and began to float back again. I could not stand this, so, plunging almost up to my neck I went for the prize and secured it.

Of course, I was wet to the skin, but what did that matter so long as I held in my hand the little gull?—a great rarity in Cornwall, only two specimens sometimes being found in a generation. It was lovely, its neck and head the tenderest pink, and the rest of its body mostly white—a miniature gull, the smallest of that species.

From the Cornish cliffs that line the coast, a whimbrel or solitary heron might now and again be cunningly bagged; but for the whimbrel's

relative, the curlew, one had to go to the Helford River, or to the mouths of the creeks in Falmouth Harbour, though they are hardly worth the trouble entailed in outwitting them, for of all tiresome, suspicious, ever wide-awake birds, the curlew is the worst.

CURLEW.

CHAPTER XI

CORNISH BIRDS (*continued*)

ON Perran sands and on the cliffs at Pennance Head, I saw my first Cornish chough, a bird which (as you can see at the Zoo) is like an elegantly built raven, with very slender legs and beak, suggestive of red sealing-wax, and so brittle-looking that one wonders they do not snap off at the least rough usage.

Jackdaws—those comical birds with human-like blue eyes—kept company with the choughs, always busying themselves with the affairs of others, perpetually chattering, and courteous to all.

At the Plymouth Hotel were five tame jackdaws—an entire nestful—and a more entertaining family I never saw, for they were up to every trick, and played in the courtyard like children.

Ravens nest in the face of the Cornish cliffs. One day my Quaker friend wanted to secure a young one, but the nest was inaccessible. Looking

CHOUGH.

over the edge, we could see it on a ledge half-way down. The cliff could not be scaled from below,

JACKDAW.

and a rope was not easily procurable. At last we hit upon a plan. We procured a big truss of straw,

and carefully balancing it, let it drop full upon the nest, which it carried away as it fell to the bottom of the cliff. One nestling was killed, but the other we found unhurt amongst the straw, which had broken its involuntary tumble. It grew up, and my friend had it for years, until one day a strange raven flew over the garden, and, I suppose, reproached "Jack" for having become tame. "Jack," whose pinion feathers had unfortunately been allowed to grow, flew off with the tempter, and Rose Lodge saw him no more!

There is a tall, isolated rock—bare, save for tufts of sea-asparagus and samphire—in Veryan Bay, well off the land. Here the greater and lesser black-back gulls, herring-gulls, a few shags, and, now and again, a stormy petrel nest. Thither I steered, and after a long, adventurous sail, reached such landing-place as there was—a risky one—and clambered to the top of the islet known as the Gull Rock.

Such a row! Gulls fluttering in every direction, uttering their querulous protestation against being disturbed, the mothers most anxious about their treasures—the eggs and fluffy young ones—which lay about in every crevice. I had no time for sentiment, so, filling my trouser's pockets and one of my coat pockets with eggs, and the remaining

RAVEN.

pockets with three baby black-backs, I essayed to come down by the way I had ascended, but, hampered with the eggs, I found it no joke.

However, after a frightful scramble, I got to the boat, my spoils intact, but my trousers minus much cloth; in fact, there was a lamentable deficiency in a most conspicuous part of that article of attire, and my man—who laughed immoderately at my sorry condition—thoughtfully arranged a spare sail for me to sit upon; and before leaving the boat I had to borrow an overcoat.

I tried to bring the baby gulls up on lob-worms, but, alas! they were too young for this dietary, and, in spite of my solicitude for their welfare, they pined for their papa and mamma, and died. R.I.P.

The present generation journeys to the Lizard Head by motor car from Helston Station; but in the days I refer to one had to take a trap thither. Thus, I found myself driving from Falmouth by a delightful route towards the head of Helford River, which we crossed in a flat-bottomed ferry-boat of the old type. Thence we went along narrow, lonely roads hedged in with thick and sturdy trees, up and up towards the downs, until we emerged upon a plateau, down which ran a perfectly straight highway bordered with telegraph lines, and ending indefinitely in the distance, eight miles away.

Right and left the horizon seemed to meet the flat, treeless moor abruptly. As we progressed, the expanse of sky seemed to increase ; and, had we not *known* the sea was near, we should have *guessed* it was. There was a marvellous sense of vastness, and one could well understand that the effects of sunrise, sunset, and cloudland here were such as could not be seen elsewhere in Great Britain.

At last we drew up at Landewednack, the most southerly town in Britain, but, curiously enough, the sea is not visible from it. The population of this remarkable little place is about five hundred, and it is considered the healthiest place in the kingdom, the mortality of the previous year (so we were told) having been only two—one a nonagenarian, and the other a six-months-old infant ! One bullock per week, we were assured, sufficed for the wants of all the housekeepers, while for mutton and other "luxuries" they depended upon chance or foraging.

A walk next day took us, not to Lizard Head (that being held in reserve), but to a cove close by, where, after leaping down the stair-like face of the cliff, my Cornish friend led me, by means of some wonderful gymnastic feat (which I was compelled to imitate), into the shaft of a disused mine facing the sea and half-way down the cliff.

It was a wonderful sight! A low, narrow, level tunnel ran a hundred yards into the cliff, the sides and roof completely clothed with a delicate, vivid green fern, found nowhere else in the district.

My friend got back to the face of the cliff by executing an extraordinary twisted upward jump; but when it came to my turn, I regretted I was not a goat! To do as my friend had done, seemed to me impossible! Coming down had been difficult enough; but — the going up! The English Channel raged 200 feet sheer below. "Jump!" said my friend, with a laugh, as though it were nothing at all. "Jump!" he repeated. "Nobody can jump for you!" I hesitated once, twice, and, like a prisoner about to be shot, I ejaculated a sacred name—*and jumped!* Jumped, if you can understand it, upwards, sideways, and round the corner at one and the same time. However, I am living to tell the tale in the year of grace, 1904.

In another lovely Cornish chine or cove was the Vicarage, where I was shown, with great pride, some fine specimens of the rare birds found in the Lizard district from time to time. The worthy vicar dilated upon the virtues of a pair of very rare spoonbills, discovered in a farmyard after a furious gale; a great white stork, shot in 1848; and a little auk that, driven off its native land by the

heavy seas, had been cast up dead on the beach close to the Vicarage.

SPOONBILL.

In a charming nook not far from the Lizard lighthouse, stood the picturesque house of Mr.

Hart, the well-known water-colour artist and ornithologist. We had some interesting talks with him, and he discoursed eloquently upon the subject of all-but-extinct British birds, and told us that he remembered the shooting of probably the very last of the Cornish great bustards—one at St. Austell in 1854, and another at Goonhill Downs a little later. It is not impossible, however, that one or two of the species may yet linger on some of the solitary moors, and a gunner always lives in the hope of one day stumbling upon one of these noble birds. Amongst his collection of stuffed birds, Mr. Hart had a particularly beautiful specimen of the little bustard shot in the district.

When speaking of shipwrecks, and of the dangerous counter-tides that swirl round the Lizard Head, Mr. Hart told us that one fine, calm November morning, upon drawing up his bedroom-blind, he saw, just below, on the fatal Deadman Rock, two fine grain-laden barques, which had in the night been drifted out of their course by the treacherous current. This kind of thing, he said, was constantly occurring.

For the study of the sea as it really is, and for the study of sea-birds, the sea-scape painter's house was most delightfully placed. But, alas! the Trinity House erected on the cliff just above

it a steam syren, or huge fog-horn, to prevent such shipwrecks as those I have referred to. I say, "*Alas!*" because the noise from the syren was unendurable, and Mr. Hart, in self-defence, had to leave his romantic, and at one time absolutely peaceful, abode.

One calm, restful day I was taken to Kynance Cove, from the highest point of which enchanted region I had a fine view of the Lizard Head, jutting out upon the Channel like a gigantic rocky pier. We saw the Shag Rock covered with birds, and watched the divers, cormorants, and big gulls in the water, so far below us that they looked no bigger than larks.

The next day was cool, moist, and breezy, so off we went after the snipe, for which the Lizard Downs are famed. Snipe shooting in placid, humdrum home-counties is easy work; but here the snipe-grounds are sometimes so covered with tussocks of coarse grass and rushes that it is difficult to walk without stumbling, while all the time one must be on the alert for birds, dogs being seldom used. Then again, these tussocks are so uniform that one portion of the ground is exactly like another, and when a snipe falls to the gun a white handkerchief must be dropped at the spot whereon the sportsman stands, whence he

must make in as straight a line as possible to where the bird has fallen, or he might have to look for its little body half the day.

Sometimes a jack-snipe got up in the most confiding manner, affording shot after shot until it succumbed, when we felt almost sorry that it had not escaped.

It is believed that some of the snipe in the Lizard district remain there all the year round, and nest there. Be that as it may, their numbers are kept well up by migrants, and one can generally be sure of a good bag, if the weather be not too stormy.

I need not dilate upon the excellency of snipe as a *bonne-bouche*, nor of that prince of birds, the woodcock, common in all the copses of West Cornwall.

We met with many carrion-crows and a few ravens, always in pairs, for it is said that crows and ravens mate for life.

Flocks of golden plover (another delicious bird) hovered overhead, and clouds of field-fares[1] and

[1] These birds were looked upon by the ancient Romans as a very dainty dish. Kept in aviaries in immense numbers, and fed on figs and flour paste, they sold when fattened for sixteen pence apiece. In modern times thousands (captured with nets) used to be sent up to London, being much appreciated by epicures, though their flesh at certain seasons is unpleasantly bitter.

missel thrushes continually passed inland, though never within shot. In frosty weather these handsome thrushes assemble in astonishing numbers in the Falmouth district, and are in great request for the table.

Few little birds were about, the wind on the exposed plateau being rather too strong for them; but several dunnocks and robins fluttered around the shelter of the friendly hedge-fences. Suddenly we came face to face with a big fox, who looked at us with the utmost nonchalance, evidently considering himself our superior.

I have spoken of the Lizard District as moorland, but it is not exactly so, for it is partly divided into large fields by an ingenious combination of hedges and stone fences, like one sees in Devonshire—not the bare rock-fences so common in England, north of the Trent, but delightful structures of granite, with earth and turf coverings, and so broad as to form a pathway at the top wide enough for two persons to walk abreast, while in the spring they are covered with moss, wild-flowers, and ferns.

From the south-west a terrific gale had slowly but surely crept up, and I was permitted for the first time to approach the Lizard Head, whose twin lighthouses I had, in the course of my

voyages, so often welcomed as the first sign of Old England. What a grand headland it is! As I stood upon its summit I felt that it was indeed one of Britannia's sea-ramparts, a citadel fit to withstand the perpetual cannonading of the ocean. The waves beating against the rock boulders at the foot of the cliffs boomed and thundered like the heavy artillery of some beleaguering force; the wind-swept spindrift was borne, like great masses of soap-suds, miles away inland, and, as the gale waxed fiercer and fiercer, and the waves higher and higher, the spray was carried 150 feet high, clear over the cliffs. To stand near the edge was impossible, but, too fascinated to retreat, I remained speechless, though had I been ever so eloquent my rhapsodies would have been wasted, for no human voice could have been heard in that terrific uproar of conflicting elements.

But I am wandering away from my subject. Resuming my theme, I must shift the scene to Falmouth, before quitting Cornwall altogether.

One can never get far from the sea in this part of England; so when I speak of "inland" birds, it must be regarded as a figure of speech. It would be more correct to speak of them as "Cornish birds, other than sea-birds." Rooks and magpies, I found, were plentiful, the latter going about in

flocks of five, and once I saw as many as ten together, and was told they were "going to a funeral!" Jays I seldom saw.

While in Cornwall I felt inclined to adopt old Gilbert White's theory that swallows sometimes remain in England to hibernate. One sunny January morning I was standing near an outhouse waiting for a friend to go shooting with me, when some sparrows emerged from their snuggery in the thatch and flew away, followed by three house-martins from out the eaves. Three more soon appeared, and I fired and missed them; but I had a good view of them and saw that they were not benumbed as if from long repose or scanty food, but lively and strong on the wing. The *Times* recorded the fact a couple of days later, but the editor sarcastically inquired why I had shot at them, forgetting that, in the interests of ornithology, I was anxious to prove beyond a doubt that they *were* swallows—swallows in the month of January in Cornwall, while snow was lying on the ground in London!

Every kind of songster, save the nightingale, is found near Falmouth. That operatic star, according to Gilbert White, crosses over from the Continent at the narrowest part of the Channel, and does not stroll so far westward as Devonshire

HOUSE-MARTIN.

and Cornwall; but the blackcap warbler—its understudy—supplies its place very effectively, many people thinking his loud, clear, rapid song quite as beautiful, if not more beautiful, than that of the nightingale.

Throughout the spring, thrushes and blackbirds pour forth a flood of harmony. A curious specimen of the latter was shot in Falmouth a few years ago. It was an entirely white bird, except for a delicate ticking of black on the breast and back.

In spring and early summer the cuckoo is much in evidence, and can be seen anywhere, sitting boldly out on a prominent branch; while delightful little stone-chats and whin-chats hover in the air or perch on the tops of stones or furze-bushes, flicking their tails about, and singing their soft, low, sweet little song. From every hedgerow the handsome yellowhammer sends out its plaintive reiteration of notes, resembling the words, "A little more bread and no cheese."

In severe weather grosbeaks and crossbills come in flocks, the latter twisting and turning about the tree-tops in every attitude, like parrakeets. Bullfinches are occasionally met with; and goldfinches wherever thistles are plentiful; while every farmyard has its swarms of chaffinches and sparrows.

On the sea-shore, tit-larks run close to the water, picking up insects, and merrily twittering.

On the tops of the loftiest fir-trees, gold-crested and fire-crested wrens play about, looking no bigger than humming-birds ; and chiff-chaffs from the same elevation utter their peculiar notes unceasingly ; while in every shrubbery wrens and robins are permanent residents.

In my Quaker friend's beautiful garden I used to help in arboriculture, and once, when we were laboriously grubbing up the roots of a felled tree, we tumbled into the pit we were excavating. We were convulsed with laughter, when a wren, that with great curiosity had been silently watching us from an adjoining tree, hopped within a yard or two of the pit and burst into the loudest of songs. The more we laughed the louder it sang, as if in derision, until finding that we could not, or would not, stop laughing, it retreated. The power in such a little body as the wren's is marvellous, and, like the robin, it sings throughout the winter when other birds are silent.

Robins in this delectable country have no fear of man. They appear to regard themselves not only as privileged birds, but in a measure as responsible for all out-door operations, which accordingly they supervise. Once, when

my friend and I were shelling peas in the kitchen-garden into an earthenware bowl on our knees, a robin, very smart in his new spring waistcoat, drew near and began to sing. We listened admiringly and kept quite still. Our silence puzzled him, and his inquisitiveness getting the better of his nervousness, he perched upon the rim of the nearest bowl, looked inquiringly up with one large brown eye, flicked his tail, bobbed his head, and went off like a flash to a bush close by. This little incident shows how tame robins may become.[1]

In the East of England there is a "Poppy Land," and there are other counties with similar characteristic names, such as "Junket Land," &c. Surely Cornwall, the paradise of the feathered tribe, should be called "Bird Land."

[1] In the *Pall Mall Magazine* (1902) the Rev. Francis Irwin recorded the fact that he had succeeded in training wild robins to take crumbs out of his mouth, and to feel so much at home on his hand as to fight one another in that position!

CHAPTER XII

LONDON BIRDS

"BIRDS in London? Birds in a wilderness of brick and mortar? Birds, where more than six million people live? *Nonsense!* Birds in the Zoological Gardens and in cages, of course there are. But birds free as the air? *No, I don't believe it!*"

Thus asseverates some old-fashioned "provincial," who knows nothing of the Empire's capital. Ignorant, too, must he be of ancient history, or it would not surprise him to hear of birds seeking the society of man and dwelling with him in great cities.

In ancient Memphis the sacred ibis walked about the streets and temples, inviolable, on penalty of death, and—as in modern Cairo and in India—sparrows entered the houses and hopped about fearlessly. The great brown kite sat upon the roofs side by side with black and grey crows,

while in every garden clumps of palms harboured owls, hooting and whistling as fancy led them.

Pigeons and doves abounded in Jerusalem, and storks built freely on the habitations of man; while the so-called solitary sparrow sat on every roof (he has been proved, however, to be *not* a sparrow, but a true thrush, in size, shape, habits, and song).

Rome had its historical geese, sacred to Juno, and spared even during the siege by the Gauls, notwithstanding the "pangs of hunger" suffered by the besieged; which said geese, in return, by means of their cries, gave timely warning of an approaching assault in the dead of night.

Pigeons were kept in immense numbers by the Romans, who had a passion for them; and Pliny writes that carrier-pigeons were well-known, and that many kinds of wild birds existed unmolested in the seven-hilled city.

In the vast area enclosed by the walls of Babylon the Great, countless flocks of birds were attracted from the plains by the growing crops, but were not meddled with, the superstitious populace regarding them as being under the special protection of certain deities.

In our "Modern Babylon," as also in the past, birds exist in profusion.

On the banks of a tidal river and surrounded by thick woods, no city could have been more attractive to birds than Old London. Kites were common objects in its streets—a proof that there was something to prey upon ; while pigeons were everywhere. Pepys, describing the Great Fire of London, records that, "The poor pigeons were loath to leave their houses, but hovered about the windows and balconies till they burned their wings and fell down."

Can you picture a decoy for wild-fowl existing in the Stuart days within musket-shot of Westminster Abbey, and close to so populous a city as London was, even in Charles II.'s reign?

In case there are those who do not know what a decoy is, I will briefly explain that it is a method of fowling practised for generations in the Norfolk Broads and elsewhere, and is accomplished by means of trained, tame ducks, who lure their unsuspecting wild compatriots from the security of the open mere, or pond, up certain quiet ditches or canals arched over with network-like tunnels of reeds ("pipes," they are called), which gradually diminish in width and height, until they terminate in a sort of pocket net, whence is no escape. Into this the wild-fowl, when half-way up the pipe, scared by the unexpected

apparition of the decoy-man and his dog, madly rush, and are easily captured; the decoy ducks treacherously disappearing by the way they came.

Now in the Stuart days, when St. James's Park, under the direction of the celebrated Frenchman, Le Nôtre, was first laid out, its paths and drives created, and its trees systematically planted, a decoy was arranged. The park was a Royal enclosure, carefully preserved and closely guarded, where privacy could be secured; so a broad canal of running water trickling through the Royal demesne was developed at its eastern end, after the Dutch fashion, into a triangular-shaped series of channels or pipes, as a decoy.

In the centre of the triangle was Duck Island, nesting-place and refuge for the domesticated wild-fowl, a forerunner, as we shall presently see, of a much larger one. In those days ducks, geese, and teal, driven by the bitter fury of north-east gales from their usual feeding-grounds round about Canvey Island and the saltings at the Thames estuary, must have often, during their flight inland, slackened speed and circled round the decoy, attracted by the tame ducks serenely swimming in the peaceful pools, and we may be sure that many a too-inquisitive member of those free companies

of mallard and widgeon finally settled down upon the water, and found themselves captives of His Majesty the King, or of his deputy, the Governor of Duck Island.

There are three kinds of bird-life in modern London—one, that of the wild birds that come and go at their own sweet will and pleasure; another, of birds that have voluntarily domesticated themselves; and the third, of the tame water-fowl on the park lakes.

All our parks have large collections of water-birds, the most notable as regards number and variety being St. James's Park, where a portion of the lake is strictly reserved for them. The care of them devolves upon the Government; and the Swiss cottage of the Ornithological Society (which formerly owned the collection) is the abode of the bird-keeper who looks after the well-being of the feathered family around him; and on the tree-covered peninsula where his house stands, some of the shyest of wild-fowl regularly breed—within sound of the ceaseless traffic of mid-London!

Let us stroll about this peninsula. There is a fine weeping-willow, putting out its buds; and, entangled at the end of a branch that dips into the water, is something that looks like a ball of

drifting weed. Presently a dabchick paddles up in a violent hurry, and disappears ; then another shows itself, and likewise vanishes. In a minute or two the pair rise to the surface some distance off, trying to make us believe that they are in no way concerned with the construction of the curious nest moored to the willow, which is what the ball of weed turns out to be.

On some rocks in the middle of the eastern end of the lake, usually sit, when not vainly fishing (for there is nothing to catch) two or three pelicans—strange-looking objects in such a locality—re-arranging their toilets. One of them, though now happily re-married, had the misfortune four years ago to lose his wife, who was killed by an irate swan—a great achievment on the part of the swan, considering how powerful a pelican is.

Not far off, on another rock, is a cormorant in full spring plumage, who assiduously watches his sober-coloured mate as she sits on a nest of sticks plentiful enough to fill a wheelbarrow. In consequence of his propensity for swallowing ducklings whole he is not a favourite, and is kept in dignified seclusion.

Like watchful sentinels, storks strut about outside the cormorant enclosure, while herons stand "at attention," lamenting the absence of fish in the lake.

Of all the beautiful tenants of St. James's Park "fowlery," the most interesting, perhaps, are the tame gulls, whether flying in graceful curves, floating upon the water head to wind, or standing on the margin querulously chattering. The silver-grey herring-gull and the slender black-faced gull are permanent residents, condescending to lay eggs and hatch them out.

Then there are swans, the black (with snake-like necks, and beaks looking as if they were tipped with official red sealing-wax) and the white, both the mute and the whistling kinds, all duly laying eggs and rearing their young.

Of geese, there are Canadian, Egyptian, Chinese, Sebastopol, and Magellanic. These also nest on the peninsula.

Ducks of all sizes and every colouring are in profusion, diving and joyfully chasing one another, or scrambling for the bread thrown out to them. There are Carolinas, tufted ducks, pochards, golden-eyes, Chilians, pintails, widgeons, shovellers, and dandy little summer and mandarin ducks.

Mallards, with specula of rich, shiny purple, and the lay of head-feathers perfect and unruffled as if painted by an Appelles or Zeuxis, swim about complacently. Two teal, intent on their

BLACK-FACED GULL.

honeymoon, paddle quietly by, the spangle on the husband's wing glistening in the sun, which lights up the rich, chestnut-brown tints of his head. The ruddy sheldrake, resplendent in his wedding-dress, slumbers on the sward ; and peacocks and cock pheasants, leaving the cares of domestic life to their partners, strut about as if the park were their own.

On the margin of the lake, water-hens run with surprising swiftness, chasing the sparrows, who, they imagine, are stealing their bread-crumbs, leaving their little black puff-balls of offspring to trot about alone and catch flies with their red beaks, which they soon learn to do in admirable style.

All these birds are regularly fed (the cormorants with whiting, and occasionally sprats), and are not dependent upon the public's generosity.

Out of a total of fifty different kinds of water-birds, over thirty breed here ; and all this beautiful and entertaining bird-life is to be seen for nothing every day in St. James's Park !

Of the wild birds that have partly or entirely domesticated themselves in London, two prominent kinds are pigeons and seagulls. Pigeons have colonised every suitable portion of our chief buildings—the Custom House, the London Insti-

tute Finsbury Circus, the Royal Exchange, St. Paul's Cathedral (for some inexplicable reason nesting on the north side in preference to the south), the Guildhall, the British Museum (where they roost amidst the allegorical figures on the tympanum of the pediment above the columns), Palace Yard, Westminster Abbey (nesting on the north side, and also outside Poet's Corner), the National Gallery, the Nelson column, Somerset House, the Law Courts (where some bird-lovers have thoughtfully had a wooden trough let into the western wall for drinking and bathing purposes), Charing Cross, and other railway-stations, and the Temple, where they muster four hundred strong, not reckoning casual visitors from the Courts of Justice who drop in and out all day long.

These Temple pigeons tuck themselves away in cosy nooks, where you may see them casting bright and inquisitive eyes upon the world beneath them. They perch in the queerest places. I have seen them in the carvings of Queen Eleanor's memorial at Charing Cross, and running up the outstretched arms of the female figures over the entrance of Prince's Hall—a curious effect.

In London there must be thousands of semi-domesticated pigeons (in the City alone their numbers have been estimated at four thousand),

probably descendants of "blue-rocks" crossed with ordinary tame birds that have strayed away; but they must not be confounded with the park ring-doves, popularly known as wood-pigeons.

In the places I have referred to, these pigeons are fed all day long, and will almost take food from one's hand. They often are too lazy or indifferent to get out of the way, and not long ago in the Guildhall yard one was actually run over and killed by a hansom cab. Greedy they certainly are, and when sharing food with sparrows they are the last to be satisfied and the last to rise from the feast, even when danger threatens.

In 1894 the Westminster pigeons were put to great straits through the cab strike. They had always found an abundant supply of corn from the nosebags of the horses on the cab-rank at the entrance of the House of Commons. For years the spot, during the Parliamentary season, had been a happy hunting-ground for hundreds of them. Peers generally walk to Parliament, or if they drive, it is in their own carriages, the horses of which would disdain to eat in public. No corn is to be found at the peer's entrance, therefore it is that the pigeons all flock to the House of Commons. With the strike the birds became quite demoralised. They could not understand

what had become of their friends the cabmen, the horses, and the corn. For some days their cries were distressing to hear, until there occurred to Superintendent Horsley the bright idea of instituting a kind of free breakfast-table. So every morning a plentiful supply of crumbs and corn was scattered on the ground, and the pigeons showed their gratitude by flapping their wings and cooing in the major key.

Pigeons, as I have said, nest in all sorts of queer and inaccessible places. Years before the rafters of Holy Trinity Church, Brompton, were opened up and exposed, a sort of loft existed between the outer and the inner roof, access being obtained by a trap-door, feathered creatures gaining admittance only at the east end through the ventilating holes in the brickwork.

The place had not been inspected for years, when one evening I took it into my head to explore it. Cautiously opening the trap-door, I stepped in, and found the floor covered many inches deep with a perfectly dry deposit, innumerable pigeons having lived there for many years, in fact ever since the church was built. All along the sides of the church were pigeons nesting, some with eggs, others with young ones. On lighting a taper, there was a tremendous stampede for the

exit, pigeons fluttered in every direction, and in the confusion a couple of bewildered starlings, who had taken lodgings in the loft, fell into my hands. Of eggs and nestlings I took tithes, as was fitting to the locality.

Bigger, and of a different kind, are the ring-doves now so plentiful in Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, St. James's Park, Fulham Palace, and other arboreal places, where they nest and seem to be thoroughly at home. Though the shyest and most unapproachable of birds in their native woods—as every gunner knows—they come in flocks to be fed on the lawns, and appear to have lost every trace of fear.

One of the prettiest sights is the assemblage of these "wood-pigeons" in the dip by the Hyde Park cascade near Albert Gate, where children minister to their inordinate appetites, and wonder at the iridescent jewels in their gleaming collars, and note with delight their frantic efforts to swallow crusts much too large for far bigger birds.

This year a pair of these wood-pigeons built a nest in the famous plane-tree at the corner of Wood Street and Cheapside, in the centre of the City, where tens of thousands of people pass all day long—the very last place in the world one

would think wild birds would choose. But the ways of birds are inscrutable. Evidently they do not object to noise, or the incessant roll of countless omnibuses and other vehicles would alone deter them from settling down in the city. Some rooks, doubtless armed with orders from a feathered house-agent, had previously inspected the tree, but being cautious (probably of north-country descent!), could not make up their minds regarding it; whereupon the giddy couple of pigeons, recently united in the bonds of matrimony, pounced upon the site as something unique, where their safety, they trusted, would be assured by the Lord Mayor and Corporation; and there they continue to reside!

In April last a pair of wood-pigeons actually built in a window-box on the fifth floor of a house on the Chelsea Embankment. Luckily the occupiers of the flat were bird-lovers, so they considerately kept the window shut and the curtain drawn until the eggs were hatched and the young ones fledged.

Another kind of wild bird, the seagull, has of late established itself in London as a daily visitor during the autumn and winter. These birds journey from the Thames mouth—an easy flight—and settle down on the river or on St. James's

Park lake, in severe weather becoming so fearless as to snatch a sprat almost from the hand. I say *almost*, because though I have watched them continuously and closely, I have never seen them *actually* take it from the hand.

This excursion to town appears to have originated with the "cold snap" of 1895, when flocks of frozen-out and starving gulls took up temporary quarters in London, singling out Westminster Bridge as a good "pitch," where they received a hearty welcome and plentiful relief. They made their appearance upon metropolitan waters the following year, and it would be pleasant to imagine that they came, not so much as harbingers of severe weather as out of gratitude for the kindly reception they had before met with; for birds have excellent memories for kindness, and are sensitively watchful for its signs, and eager to profit by it.

In winter, during heavy gales, the Thames between the bridges swarms with these birds, and sometimes an extraordinary sight can be witnessed in St. James's Park, where thousands of tern and seagulls (chiefly black-headed gulls, kittiwakes, a few herring-gulls, and lesser black-backed gulls) settle down on the area reserved for the water-fowl. A miniature sea gets up, and

this multitude of wild gulls ride on the water, head to wind, in orthodox nautical fashion; but their presence seems to disturb the regular tenants of the lake, who vacate the precincts and retire disgusted to the banks.

The frolics of these gulls, as they deftly catch in mid-air anything thrown to them from the bridges, is a constant source of amusement to hundreds of people throughout the winter. Every evening—sometimes in daylight, between three and four o'clock—they leave in detachments of from ten to two hundred, flying over Fulham towards some roosting-place in the direction of Richmond, returning the next day. But when March arrives, they all, save a solitary bird here and there, retire to the Thames estuary on business of importance connected with nests and eggs.

It has been estimated by the Belfast Natural History Society that in the United Kingdom there are 2,000,000 gulls, but had they added a nought to this estimated number they would have been nearer the mark. Since gulls have been "protected," in Scotland the lesser black-back gulls have increased to such an extent that they rival the hooded crow and common rook in being regarded as nuisances.

CHAPTER XIII

LONDON BIRDS (*continued*)

RICHMOND PARK, as the crow flies, is eight miles from Charing Cross, therefore within the area of Greater London. Yet Jesse, in his interesting book on natural history, tells us how, seated on the root of a tree in the beautiful Royal pleasaunce, he heard at one moment the laughing note of the green woodpecker, at another the cooing of the wood-pigeon, then the chirping of the blue-tit, or the piping of the wryneck, &c. He recognised the tap-tapping of the great spotted woodpecker and the cries of the combatant missel-thrush; the nightingale's trill charmed his ear, and he delighted in the voice of the much-libelled cuckoo.

All these birds are still to be found there, and also in Kew Gardens, a perfect refuge for the feathered race. But it is hardly realised that in Inner London these denizens of wood, field, and wold may still be seen and heard.

Six years ago a snipe—the last bird one looks for in a city—flew through the open window of a house near St. James's Park—probably blown out of its course by a high wind; and a friend of mine recollects, forty or fifty years ago, seeing sportsmen shoot snipe in the Battersea marshes. He himself once put up a brace of partridges at South Kensington, on the site of the Natural History Museum, at that time little more than a wilderness.

The wonderful masses of foliage in London—and it is the greenest city in Europe—furnish any number of quiet nooks where the sweetest of songsters, retreating from the open country, have founded innumerable colonies that bid fair to develop into great commonwealths.

To name a few of these eligible bird-quarters—all our parks, especially Kensington Gardens and St. James's Park, the Botanical Gardens, Kew Gardens and Richmond Park, Holland House, most of the beautifully laid-out cemeteries, and what are left of the leafy groves of Norwood and Dulwich. In one or other of these the nightingale and the black-cap have been heard, also the garden-warbler, the willow-wren, the ivy-wren, and the chiff-chaff. The thrush and the blackbird—those old-established favourites: prominent examples of British talent—sing everywhere. I

know of one metropolitan cemetery where a delightful concert goes on morning and evening, these two birds taking the lead, robins generously

WOOD-WARBLER.

contributing, and hedge-sparrows helping with their gentle pipe.

Other shy birds have even built nests in the

parks, especially in the Flower Walk at Kensington. There are records of blue-tits and cole-tits, bramble-finches, sedge-warblers, wrens, gold-crested wrens, chaffinches, redstarts, and linnets, while swallows and swifts are common enough, the former hawking over the water, the latter shrieking high up in the air. I once saw a swift in Fleet Street chasing insects persistently up and down between Ludgate Circus and the Law Courts. The alleged presence of wild turtle-doves in London is doubtful.

The rook fights shy of town ; at any rate he is very little in it. This cannot proceed from dislike to mankind, because rookeries are generally found close to some mansion or farmhouse. Possibly they are jealous of the wood-pigeons for having invaded so many desirable trees. A few rooks' nests are kept up here and there, more as a matter of form than anything else ; but in the outlying districts of Finchley, Greenwich, Streatham, Roehampton, Wimbledon, and Richmond, there are still some fine rookeries left.

A few jackdaws can be seen at the Tower of London, where tradition says a nest was built by them in one of the gilt crowns surmounting the wind-vanes over the keep. The Tower can boast of three ravens, most interesting creatures, but not

SEDGE-WARBLER.

From an original drawing by Miss Fletcher, of Cambridge.

so clever as one of their predecessors who, when a penny was offered him, seized it in his powerful beak, and hopped away to the yeoman gaoler's lodgings on the Green, where he tendered it to a little girl in exchange for a piece of cheese, which he instantly swallowed. This indulgence was possibly the cause of his lamented death.

Tame ravens nest at Crouch Hill, five miles from Charing Cross; and herons at Wanstead Park, eight miles away; and I have watched them, and also hawks, flying over the centre of London, the latter on the look-out for pigeons.

Kingfishers have been seen in Kensington Gardens, and in still greater numbers at Kew.

As to starlings—whose beauty in the spring is something to wonder at, when the sunlight reveals the iridescent bronze-green and gold of their backs interspersed with reddish-white spots—they are permanent residents in London, and in greater numbers than is generally supposed. Like sparrows, they are quite at home amidst bricks and mortar. Most church towers harbour communities of them. They build regularly, and only when autumn arrives do they leave town for the country, gathering together for the trip like swallows. They also nest in ordinary dwelling-houses, in holes made by the removal of bricks. So bold are

they that they will run up to any back-door to pick up bread thrown out for them.

Starlings have a peculiar habit of balancing themselves in Blondin-like fashion on telegraph wires, and seem to delight in the swaying motion. Other favourite perches are the pinnacles of wind-vanes, or the tops of chimneys, where they will sit for a long time, quaintly whistling. They apparently excite the jealousy of sparrows, and writs of ejectment, from desirable residences in dispute, are constantly being furiously served by the latter.

Many starlings, presumably householders, come to roost, with much chattering, in the ilexes or evergreen oak-trees of St. James's Park, but where they feed I do not know.

Tamest and most prominent of town birds are the sparrows. Having been citizens of London for generations past, they are so associated with the metropolis that the City might have appropriately added to its arms the quartering of a sparrow volant or couchant (or whatever the correct heraldic expression may be). All the year round they are to be seen everywhere, and no edifice is safe from their nest-building operations. Several nests were found in Wellington's lap when his statue was removed from the arch at Consti-

tion Hill; while one is discovered every season in the folds of Canning's Roman dress, near the Westminster Sessions House. Over the porch of St. Michael's Vicarage, Pimlico, in the figure of St. George and the Dragon, a pair of sparrows this year constructed an unsightly nest, which the kindly vicar would not allow to be touched.

Sparrows are much maligned creatures, looked down upon as plebeian, and ignored for their homely appearance and supposed sootiness of their plumage. People either like them immensely or detest them. An ornithological friend of mine —the kindest-hearted of men, and a great lover of birds—had an unaccountable dislike to house-sparrows. He designated them pests—mischievous, thieving, bold, vulgar, and impudent; and loved to dilate upon their greediness and their wicked liking for grain, fruit, and buds. Their notes, which he described as a "wearisome chattering incessantly interrupted by a still more tiresome yelp," irritated him greatly.

Most of these accusations are unmerited, as close observation shows. Should a bird that was sacred to Venus Aphrodite be looked down upon? Surely not.

True, he is no respecter of rank and fashion; but in the present age this is no great fault. He is

SPARROWS.

eminently sociable ; not only fond of the company of his own kind, but also of man. He is thoroughly domesticated, an admirable husband (though perhaps a trifle jealous), and a devoted parent. I maintain that his chirp is pleasant, lively, and cheerful ; while his throat capacity is such that, under early and proper tutelage, he can be taught to sing like a canary. Years ago, when waiting outside Shadwell Station, I was much entertained by a sparrow on the roof of a house warbling a distinct harmony in the manner of a linnet.

On the very delicate subject of his liking for fruit, grain, and buds, one must not dogmatise. That he is given to peck the stigmas of crocuses I admit, but the saffron is a medicine, and possibly the sparrow in spring requires an alterative stimulant and knows it. Insects he freely feeds upon, and stuffs his offspring with them. I have watched sparrows diligently "quartering" a tree, and picking minute aphidæ from both sides of the leaves ; but when apparently intent upon fruit, they are really after the insects which are destroying it. If they do take toll of grain it does not amount to much, and the harm done is counterbalanced by the service they render in their destruction of noxious insects. Grass-seeds they are very keen on, and bread they will eat to

any amount, fighting with one another for the best piece, or *pretending* to fight (for they are full of fun). And I have often seen them hard at work upon my hollyhocks, cleaning them of insects for the delectation of their young ones. It has been asked, How many millions of millions of sparrows are there probably existing in the British Isles? Well, thirty-five thousand five hundred and fifty-nine have been killed in two years alone by the members of one sparrow-club in Suffolk. The club was formed because of the supposed damage done to the fruit and grain crops by these omnivorous birds. Worked out at the same rate in other districts, rural and urban, the sparrow population of the whole country must puzzle all ordinary arithmeticians.

As to the sparrow's personal appearance, he is anything but ugly or sooty. His plumage is attractive, an effective "arrangement" of deep chestnut, brown, grey, and black; while, ever dusting and washing himself, even in winter, he is as clean as any other bird.

House-sparrows' nests are remarkable. Though the bird is hardy, it appears to be susceptible to cold, and even in summer collects feathers to line its holes with, whether there be young ones or not; and these holes, under the eaves of buildings or in

walls, are always warm, cosy nooks, protected from rain and wind.

These nests (utterly out of proportion to the size of the birds inhabiting them) consist of a large mass of hay, straw, feathers, wood, horsehair, and even paper, carelessly put together. Egg-laying occurs three, and sometimes four, times in the course of a year, and as on an average five are hatched, no wonder an immense flock of birds is rapidly accumulated.

Early in February preparations for pairing begin, and then it is that the cock-bird puts himself into absurd attitudes to attract his future partner in life, flicking his tail, fluffing out his plumage, bobbing his head up and down, and giving vent to his most insinuating chirp.

In the courting season, every now and again a sudden *furore* seizes a small group of sparrows, who rush like furies at one another, yelping at the top of their voices, tumbling on the ground together like shapeless balls of feathers; until, as it were recollecting themselves, they subside into decorous behaviour. If closely watched, it will be seen that only two are really combatants—more often than not a couple of cocks making up rather violently to a hen-bird; the rest are spectators backing up their respective champions,

though often it develops into a genuine fight all round.

Few birds are more careful of their young than sparrows, or feed them more assiduously. If the nestlings are carried off, the parents will follow them for miles. Once, I recollect, by way of experiment, four nestlings were conveyed from the eaves of a house to a cellar some distance away, which had but one small aperture for air and light, and here they lay perfectly still. For some hours the parents were observed flying over the very spot, when suddenly the prisoners uttered a plaintive cry. The heart-broken father and mother heard it, stopped short, crept through the hole, and set to work to feed them. The nestlings were then released, to the great joy of all concerned.

Wary as London sparrows are, they become quite fearless when once they realise that they will not be molested. And this they soon do, for no one interferes with them, and even street-boys have learnt to welcome them. They can be seen in crowded Seven Dials, sitting unconcernedly in the road, at a distance looking like so many stones. They congregate near cab-stands, particularly the large one in Piccadilly, where along the railings for nearly a quarter of a mile hundreds assemble;

and in the parks, where they share crumbs with the pigeons. In hot weather they love to sit flat on the short, warm grass in Parliament Square, Lincoln's Inn Fields, the Law Courts, the Temple Gardens, and the British Museum, and hardly deign to budge an inch for any one. In extremely hot weather they keep their mouths wide open with the most amusing appearance of affected exhaustion. An amusing story is told concerning Mr. Pol, the well-known figure in the Tuileries Gardens, Paris, who has tamed sparrows marvellously, and is in the habit of daily feeding the birds who make their home there. Once he was just about to feed them—they flying around him as usual—when he found his pocket-book was missing. Hurriedly he set off to the police-station to give information of his loss, but the birds, determined not to lose their dinner, flew after him, some of them perching on his hat and shoulders, and many of them entering the police-station. They then followed him all the way back until he entered the garden and fed them.

The sole enemy of town sparrows is the cat, but puss can only catch a few young ones now and again. What becomes of them all, when and where they die, no one knows. I have never come across a full-grown London

sparrow dead, and I have never met any one who has.

Sometimes, especially in rough weather, sparrows are very scary and nervous, and are even suspicious of their well-known friends who feed them regularly. I have a large colony of them at the back of my house, amongst them being a white, or nearly white, individual. No cats infest the place, and the birds are encouraged in every way to come; yet when bread is thrown out to them, however hungry they may be, they keep aloof for a little time, until one bird, bolder than the rest, pops down. Then the others quickly follow. It is as though they always feared being "trapped."

When in a nervous mood they will sit in rows, all facing one way, on the roof-ridges, craning their necks and contriving to make themselves look ridiculously thin and lanky, as they peer over at whatever they consider unfamiliar.

I am in the habit of supplying sparrows with cotton wool and straw for their nests, and it is the funniest thing imaginable to watch them manipulate the wool—frequently a piece double their own size—so that it cannot get entangled in their legs.

Birds undoubtedly recognise one another, and have a language of communication. Once I saw

a cock-sparrow vainly attempt to lift a big straw. He tried both ends, and then the middle. It was too heavy; he could not lift it, and there was a breeze blowing. At last he desisted, flew a short distance, and gave a peculiar cry for help. The next moment his wife, in response to his appeal, joined him, and the pair, one at each end, lifted the long straw and flew away with it to their nest.

One other characteristic, or custom, of London sparrows, and I have done with them.

As advocates of equality and of representative government they like to make themselves heard in public; and thus has originated those strange assemblies in certain localities, called "Sparrow Parliaments." I can name several. In the churchyard of St. Dunstan's-in-the-East is a large plane-tree (sole survivor of an ancient pair), whose branches towards evening are laden with sparrows (frequenters of the grain barges on the river) who for many years have appropriated it as a roosting-place. They sit motionless, each trying to talk the other down. The din is tremendous; but as darkness comes on, some speaker, or chairman, calls the meeting to order, and there is unbroken silence until the next morning.[1] There are *smaller*

[1] Sparrows begin to faintly twitter as early in the summer as half-past three o'clock.

Parliaments (County or Borough Councils, we must suppose) in a plane-tree at Hyde Park Terrace; in a tree in Church Street (west side), Chelsea; in a holly-bush in the grounds of St. Mark's College, King's Road, Chelsea; in a couple of trees at the side of the High Road, Kilburn (Lords and Commons, most likely); in the garden of the Observatory House, Honor Oak, packed every evening; and a little one in the Fulham Road, not far from the Town Hall.

What do they discuss? and why does *every* sparrow join in the debate? Are the members elected on purpose to air bird-grievances generally? Is it really "business" that they discuss, or do they—like many of our own legislators and agitators—talk solely to gain a cheap notoriety for eloquence and public-spiritedness?

When Mr. Chamberlain was addressing a large tariff-reform audience last August at Welbeck, the chattering of the sparrows that thronged the roof of the hall so interfered with the speaker's voice being heard, that the edict went forth for their removal. The work of netting them, however, was not easy, for they had chosen the most inaccessible spots. But the "closure" proved effectual, and they were dislodged.

CHAPTER XIV

BIRDS OF PASSAGE

BY Birds of Passage I do not in this case mean simply those that migrate from one region to the other—birds of the sunny South that nest at the northernmost limit of their wonderful flight; nor African wanderers, that, like the swallows, take their annual trip to temperate-climated England; nor quails, that in great flights arrive at Malta *en route* for Europe, almost to the hour; nor the water-fowl, that in long streams wend their way to hyperborean regions, alighting for a short time at Heligoland; nor those innumerable birds whose wailing and whistling are heard at night by watchers on our headlands, and are often found by the lonely guardians of the Wolf Rock, Eddystone, and other lighthouses, dashed to death against the thick plate-glass of the lantern.

I mean more particularly the birds I met during a "passage" by mail steamer from Adelaide, *viâ* King George's Sound, Colombo, Aden, Port

Said, Malta, Brindisi, and home overland by Rome and Paris.

Clear of Spencer Gulf, we sped westward past the Great Australian Bight, where the South Indian Ocean was tenanted by albatrosses—only a few being of the great wandering kind—that kept passing and re-passing our good ship, although she was steaming every bit of sixteen knots an hour.

In the Sound were the usual pelicans, gannets, and cormorants of Australia. Gulls politely escorted us clear of Cape Leeuwin, then left us to an unbroken stretch of three thousand miles across the ocean to Colombo.

The tropics gave us back the familiar boatswain and frigate-birds and boobies,[1] and when five hundred miles off Sumatra we saw a few stray and enterprising gulls.

As we approached Ceylon, Adam's Peak began to rise up boldly; the picturesque harbour of Colombo came into sight; a faint and fragrant scent was wafted from the shore, verifying Bishop Heber's often ridiculed lines—

> "What though the spicy breezes
> Blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle,
> Though every prospect pleases
> And only man is vile,"

[1] *Vide* Chapter IV.

and coast birds, pretty nearly alike all the world over, welcomed us as old friends to their lovely island.

Time admitting of only a few drives in the immediate neighbourhood of the town, we saw hardly any wild birds, and, much to my disappointment the luxuriance of the vegetation prevented any exploration in search of them.

The north-east monsoon blew gently across the Arabian Sea, giving us a fair wind and smooth water, and after six days we slipped past Cape Gardafui and reached Aden.

It was March, and pretty hot even for us sun-hardened Australians and Anglo-Indians, but it was a dry heat and more endurable than we had anticipated. Here again, ornithologically speaking, disappointment awaited me; but high up in the intensely blue firmament hovered, with motionless wings, many vultures and huge eagles—mere specks in the distance—intently watching for something to pounce upon and devour; while hawks now and again dashed from unseen eyries like lightning upon the swarms of rock-pigeons nesting in the cavities and roosting on the inaccessible crags surrounding the celebrated tanks outside the town. They recalled Jeremiah's reference to the "dove that maketh her nest in the sides of the hole's

mouth" ; and I realised that this was veritably the Biblical East.

The sun-scorched pinnacles of Aden faded away astern, and we passed just inside the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. The well-known story of how the island of Perim was taken by Great Britain was told and re-told by our weather-beaten captain, who went on to relate to his appreciative listeners how, when serving on board H.M.S. *Cyclops*, in 1859, the passengers and crew of the P. & O. ss. *Alma* were rescued from a rock in the Red Sea, upon which they had scrambled when the steamer went down, and how they were exposed to the awful heat for three days without a drop of water, how when the man-of-war's boats came to take them off, the half-frantic shipwrecked sailors clamorously offered bottles of brandy, saved from the stores, for one drink of water, and had to be forcibly restrained from drinking too much of it.

He told us also another tale about locusts, some sceptical passenger having ventured to question the veracity of the account of some of the plagues of Egypt. "Why," said the captain, "the Bible is right as a trivet. I was once steaming up the Red Sea, close in shore on the western side, and for five miles along a sandy beach I saw myriads of locusts. They had been blown from the desert by a strong

westerly breeze into the water and drowned. Increase their numbers, and you have the plague of locusts at once."

Towards noon a gun was fired as we approached a dangerous-looking headland; then another, this time immediately over my cabin, whither I had retired. The cause of the excitement was a large steamer stranded on the rocks abreast of us, and signalling. A boat put off from the wreck, but we could not wait for it, nor was it necessary, for the authorities at Aden were aware of the disaster and had requested our captain to leave a despatch stating that assistance would be sent.

Half-way up the Red Sea (which, by the way, is not red, but deep blue) long lines of cranes flew, with outstretched legs, from Egypt, across the water to Arabia, and flights of wind-blown quails tore in the same direction.

It has been surmised that cranes—figures of which, evidently of great antiquity, appear in some rocks in the Sinaitic desert—were the flesh food supplied to the Israelites when they got tired of manna. Both cranes and quails migrate in multitudes, the latter generally at night, the miracle being that they arrived exactly at the identical spot where the Israelites were encamped. Cranes,

however, are "dry eating," and quails, as we all know, are particularly toothsome and satisfying.

Then, to my delight, several hoopoes fluttered past the stern, and one alighted and remained for a short time on the taffrail. A crest-like double row of orange feathers, tipped with blue, that can be elevated at pleasure, adorns the head of these lovely birds. Hence the name, *Upupa*, or it may be derived from the hoopoes' peculiar cry. They are migrants, and, although natives of Africa and Asia, come over to Europe, and sometimes to England; Gilbert White recording their presence at Selborne. They have been seen in Cornwall occasionally, and in every instance were very shy and difficult to approach.

Some hours later we were told that early the next morning the steamer would be off the Sinaitic Peninsula. So, at five o'clock, while half the ship's company were asleep, a few enthusiasts, shivering on deck, gazed in silent admiration at the scene before them. Here the Red Sea contracts to a width of twenty miles, and the mountains on both sides are plainly visible.

Abreast of us was Sinai, some miles inland, an awfully barren, table-topped mass, 8,000 feet high. Around it lay the great and terrible wilderness, with a broad edging of snow-white sand coming

down to the water's edge. Inextricable labyrinths of jagged rocks and peaks, looking as if all the hill-tops in the world had been flung there, filled up the desert, except at the base of Mount Sinai; and we understood the difficulties endured by God's chosen people during the forty years of wandering, and why they had to be miraculously guided.

The dawn hastened, changing the dim grey of the rocks to rosy red, flooding their surfaces with light, and revealing in clear outline every hollow and ravine.

We turned to look at the Egyptian side, where the towering limestone ranges had begun to brighten, and again at Mount Sinai bathed in glory, for the sun had risen to a point immediately behind its summit. We looked and looked again at the mountain that once "did burn with fire," striving to impress the scene for ever on our memories, and as we gazed the sun moved higher and higher, the coast of Egypt reflected its strengthening rays, and—

> "East and west, without a breath,
> Mixt their dim lights, like life and death,
> To broaden into boundless day."

We passed into the tamarisk-planted railway-cutting—for it resembles nothing so much—known

FLAMINGO.

as the Suez Canal, and speeding across the Bitter Lakes, slowed down again towards Ismailia, the half-way station. Then on to Kantara, a modern ferry, where strings of dilapidated camels are everlastingly waiting to cross over, their owners dressed much as their ancestors were centuries ago when they travelled along this route from Syria into Egypt, a route made sacred from the fact that Joseph, Mary, and the Holy Babe used it in their flight from Herod.

Nearing Lake Menzaleh, by whose margin the canal runs, long lines of something rose-white appeared on the horizon, and turned out to be immense flocks of birds, chiefly flamingoes, standing four or five feet high. These I made up my mind to interview, if possible.

At Port Said I disembarked, and as the branch steamer would not leave for Malta until the following day, I laid my plans accordingly. Through the kindly intervention of Cook & Son's agent, I chartered a reliable Arab boy, a plough ox, and a donkey, the latter quite unlike the wretched creatures one associates with sea-side resorts, that have to be goaded even into the semblance of a trot, but a fine, sturdy animal, full of spirit, handsome, well-groomed, and a pleasure to ride.

Along the sandy causeway, separating the

Menzaleh Lake from the Mediterranean, we got pretty near a network of lagoons where we could see enough birds to satisfy any naturalist, or the most exacting sportsman. Flamingoes, in orderly range, like regiments of soldiers, were diligently fishing, protected by a vigilant sentinel whom I heartily wished at Jericho. Others on the margin were hatching their eggs, but, so far as I could see with a powerful field-glass, they were not sitting astride a truncated cone of dry mud, as frequently depicted, but were, like storks and herons, squatting comfortably upon rough nests and little hillocks.

They were in company with pelicans, cormorants, geese, ducks, storks, spoonbills, waders—such as sand-pipers and the like innumerable—and a few ibises. These last seemed to be of a glossy kind, with black feathers variegated with green, but I thought I detected a pair of the famous sacred ibises, white-plumaged with black-tipped wings.

It is rare for either kind of ibis to visit the Nile Delta, except when the river rises, and as they are under no protection, modern Egyptians kill and eat them without compunction.

I had seen a stuffed glossy ibis which had been shot at Hayle, in Cornwall. But here was the real thing, the living bird, once so sacred in its native land.

IBIS.

In the old days to kill an ibis, even accidentally, was an awful offence, and the transgressor was stoned to death. Dead ibises were embalmed, placed in earthen pots, and ranged on shelves in special catacombs, where they are still found in great numbers, and there are some specimens in the Egyptian rooms at the British Museum. They were worshipped probably because, since aridity was the scourge of the land, and humidity its blessing, and the presence of water-loving ibises coincided with the overflow of the Nile and the possibility of continuous irrigation, they were so associated with the river that, in the minds of the ancient Egyptians, they had a simultaneous existence, a supernatural and secret relation existing between them.

In disposition the ibis is singularly peaceful and mild. It migrates, and is now and again found in various parts of Europe. Like the raven, it is monogamous, and when death severs a pair, the survivor seldom forms a second union, but mourns its mate all its life.

It was now about time for us to begin stalking, as the flamingoes, who can see a long distance, had commenced to fidget about, and the scout-bird was uttering a low note of alarm. I dismounted, and, getting on the off-side, quietly led the donkey by

a circuitous route nearer and nearer the birds ; my Arab boy, close by me, leading the ox. The flamingoes, shy of pedestrians, are so accustomed to see an ox and an ass yoked together in the plough, that they thought nothing of it, and settled down again to their fishing. Slowly we got within range of the big duck-gun I had borrowed. *Bang!* and two flamingoes bit the dust—or, rather, the water. Then what a commotion arose! great as when Robinson Crusoe fired the first shot on his lonely island. Clouds of feathered fowl rose in the air, some going straight away, the rest circling around and almost obscuring the light.

Evidently nothing more could be done. I secured some flamingo eggs after gathering up the spoil, and we left. They were beautiful birds in full plumage, with rose tint warming into bright red on back and wings. Their peculiar beak, apparently useless for getting food, is wonderfully adapted, when reversed—which position their long necks enable them to achieve—for stirring up the mud, as with a trowel, where small fish are hiding.

On the causeway we put up quails and several pintails and sand-grouse—pretty little birds with pointed wings and sharp-pointed tails, like swallows, and so exactly matching the earth in colour, that they, evidently aware of their consequent invisibility, refused to budge until we almost trod upon them.

CHAPTER XV

BIRDS OF PASSAGE (*continued*)

AT Malta I was in the land of migrating quails, and arrived there just at the right season. Said my friend at Valetta, the principal medical officer of the island: "You have come just in the nick of time to witness the arrival of the quails. The wind is in the right quarter, and old sportsmen predict that it will bring over the first instalment to-night. Now we will pack up a few things and start for Zurrico, whence we can easily reach the most southerly point on the coast, and see the fun."

An excellent supper, capital wine, and good tobacco sent us to bed at peace with all mankind, and the very small hours of morning saw us on the cliffs that look across the Mediterranean to the African continent, whence the feathered visitors were expected. Some had already arrived, and the repeated explosions of guns of every imaginable pattern and size told us the "professionals" were at work. One man was actually armed with a blunderbuss, literally a "scatter gun"

(as Americans call a fowling-piece), and at short range contrived, with very small shot, to account for a great number.

We took no part in the slaughter, but noticed that many of the little travellers, exhausted by the voyage, were lying about unable to stir, and could be caught by the hand. Presently we saw, far out at sea, what looked like a small and rapidly moving cloud. It was a flight of quails that would not wait for the night, but were determined not to lose the fair southerly wind. On they came, and, with a whirr and a rush, plumped down close to where we were crouching.

Hardly giving them time to breathe, a couple of cut-throat looking rascals—in reality, perhaps, honest subjects of His Majesty—stole out from behind a bush, and with a long and very fine net secured the lot, much as poachers take coveys of partridges.

Next morning all the loafers of Valetta and Citta Vecchia, the old capital, seemed to have assembled, this being a grand opportunity for turning a penny with a minimum of trouble. All night long the birds had been arriving in dense masses. It had *rained* quails, so that, according to a popular saying on the shores of the Bosphorus and the Ionian Islands, "nothing was required but to stoop and pick them up."

When migrating, thousands fail to reach the land, as they are incapable of resisting an unfavourable wind. They fall into the sea, and the rocky shores of Malta are often strewn with their drifted bodies.

These birds were for export, and after being thrust into flat, shallow boxes, barred in front and covered with canvas at the top, they were packed off to Paris and London, where, early in the season, when fed up on hemp-seed, they secured good prices—from ninepence to eighteenpence each.

When they arrive at Malta they are hardly worth cooking, but, if unmolested, they quickly recover and lay on flesh.

Some epicures consider the quail second in flavour only to woodcock, snipe, and golden plover, but others think the ortolan surpasses it. The only fault I find with either ortolan or quail is that there is so little of it.

These migratory quails of Africa, sober sandy-brown in colour, are prettily marked with buff stripes and black bars, and have a peculiar anchor-shaped spot down the middle of their white throats. But they have no such pretensions to beauty as have the handsome painted quails of India, where the common kind abound to such an extent in certain localties that shooting them is no sport at all. An ordinary sportsman can easily bag sixty

QUAIL.

brace in a short time, and on some of the islets at the Ganges delta cultivated with *gram* they swarm like locusts, every footstep raising a cloud of them.

Every movement of these neat little birds is graceful, and nothing is more charming to see than a mother quail with from ten to fourteen little ones around her, some nestling on her back, in the manner of chickens.

Indolent, when not fiercely quarrelling, quails delight in dusting themselves and lying half asleep outstretched in the warm sun. Once alarmed, they bestir themselves pretty quickly, and run swiftly in the scantiest cover, getting up with reluctance and flying close to the ground in a straight line. If not shot down, they re-alight and double, like hares, to deceive the dogs.

Quails occasionally remain all the winter in England. A bevy of sixteen is recorded as having been reared in the Falmouth district; in the eastern counties, too, coveys are sometimes seen.

A branch steamer took me from Malta to Brindisi, and thence I travelled to the Eternal City. Italy was a new country to me, but I had read that it abounded with feathered life, so I kept a sharp look-out, though at first there was not much to see. From the marshes, where herds of wild-looking Italian buffaloes grazed, rose a

few herons, and some water-hens paddled on the stagnant pools; crows cawed from the trees, and at long intervals a scared thrush or blackbird rushed terror-stricken from the bushes. Otherwise there was no trace of life, human or animal, for many miles.

At last the prospect, ornithologically, began to brighten. Kites, buzzards, and hawks appeared on the wing, possibly because of the proximity of some slaughter-houses and consequent offal, especially as there were apparently no small birds to prey upon.

Arrived at Rome, I inspected St. Peter's and the principal churches, and, being Eastertide, I was able to witness, at St. Anthony's, the interesting annual ceremony of the benediction of beasts of burden; and as several people brought parrots, pigeons, and other such-like pets, I may say that birds were included in the function.

The animals were be-ribboned and their trappings polished up, reminding one of our own horses at the Whitsuntide parade in Regent's Park. Even the birds were decorated, and as they passed by the priest at the church door in orderly procession, it was hard to believe that the dumb creatures did not realise and appreciate the ceremony, so self-conscious did many of them look.

Italians are very ingenious in snaring birds. They do not waste money on powder and shot,

but, wherever possible, catch them with traps or nets. One would think house-martins and the like would be too much for them; but, no! the street-boys capture them with long silk lines with a noose at the end, to which is attached a small feather, the swallows snatching at the feather as the wind raises it high in the air. The victims are sold to be eaten!

Charles Waterton speaks of robins lying for sale on the counters of the bird-market in Rome, so I went to have a look at them myself.

I have seldom come across such a variety of birds as were displayed there, Italians apparently devouring anything with wings. Besides skinny chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks, and guinea-fowls, there were scores of ring-doves, larks, tom-tits, blackbirds, thrushes, and robins, quails innumerable, ortolans, and beccaficos or fig-peckers.

Desolate as the Campagna looks, there are in it some delightful spots. One in particular, near the picturesque Ponte Nomentana, afforded me the quietest retreat from the bustle and noise of Rome. The rapid stream flowed between high banks covered with weeping willows; an expanse surrounded by low hills formed a natural amphitheatre, and the slopes were broken by plots of green wheat and little dells shaded by low-growing

trees. Birds delighted to sport in this temporary security—egrets, golden orioles, roller-birds, graceful bee-eaters, and pretty red-legged partridges, besides such familiar British friends as "caldarini" (goldfinches), in flocks.

Once the Campagna was inhabited, and surrounding the city were country houses where wealthy people lived in the season amongst their animals and birds. Becker, in his "Gallus," speaks of the pleasure of jaded citizens watching at evening "the returning herds and teams assembled round the broad water-troughs of the inner court to drink, whilst geese and ducks, merrily splashing about, suffered themselves to be laved by the descending jet of the simply constructed fountain. All around the court were various kinds of poultry. Peacocks with their wide-expanded tails, red-feathered flamingoes, Numidian and Rhodian hens with their own brood, or performing not less tenderly the office of foster-mothers to young pheasants, the eggs of which had been stealthily placed under them to hatch by the steward—all collected cackling and coaxing round the steward's wife, who scattered food amongst them from the lap of her gown. A brood of doves, too, would ever and anon make a descent in the midst from the tower-like pigeon-cots; whilst turtle and ring-

doves, caught at great pains, together with a multitude of fieldfares, were to be seen confined in particular pens where they were fed."

Italians have been accused of cruelty to birds, but it is more the result of want of thought than want of heart, and of late years gentleness to living creatures has much increased. We, in England, cannot boast of our treatment of our feathered friends so long as we confine linnets, goldfinches, and the like in small cages, and use them as implements for gambling by making one sing against the other, and betting on the result. The thought of a bird imprisoned in a tiny cage, its eyes burnt out with red-hot needles, singing, in order that the brutes who captured it may win or lose pots of beer, does not make one proud of humanity.

As a matter of fact, there are still people in London who regard the burning of a finch's eye, in order to enhance its singing powers, to be a sportsmanlike proceeding! It is such brutes who, after netting wild birds in numbers by the aid of a decoy, cram the miserable captives into cages, knowing that numbers must die of suffocation and overcrowding.

Take, for example, the metropolitan suburb of Enfield, which is singularly well fitted for the exploits of these netting criminals. There are

stretches of market-gardens, and numerous patches of waste land to provide thistles, whereon chaffinches, goldfinches, and linnets love to feed. The birds most sought after, therefore, abound in this district. As for the men who are devoted to catching them, it is a mistake to suppose they come from the poorest classes of society. On the contrary, they are, as a rule, men earning good wages, but not trained mechanics.

The ordinary village constable cannot reasonably be expected to attack, single-handed, a score of more or less unscrupulous ruffians, even if he knew —and in many cases he cannot know—of their presence. But the authorities in charge of the county police outside the metropolitan area would do well to devote more attention to the gangs that go about to rob the countryside of its songsters.

The law, however, is sagacious enough on the question of wild birds. By the Act of 1880 it was made illegal, between March 1st and August 1st, to shoot or net any wild bird of a long list, which includes the goldfinch, the lark, and the nightingale. Moreover, it was an equal offence to have in one's possession, during the same period, one of these wild birds recently killed or taken. On conviction, the penalty for each bird was made £1. Birds not in the list, such as the chaffinch,

linnet, thrush, were also forbidden, but for them the penalty was only 5s., after two convictions. The 1880 Act thus made a close-time of five months in the year, but by later Acts in 1894 and 1896, County Councils were allowed to apply for an order extending this close-time and also the list of birds. Many councils have done so, and the result is that practically all round London the trapping or netting of any of our singing-birds is a punishable offence at any time of the year.

When we remember what kind of fate awaits them on capture—the torture of a tiny cage in a foul room, the added horror of blindness—or, when, thinking only of our own pleasure, we try to picture an England with never a song from its hedgerow or coppice, surely there will be no hesitation in wishing all good fortune to the police in their hunt after bird torturers. Then take cock-fighting, which, though illegal, is by no means extinct. A fight took place in September, 1904, in a disused quarry in a lonely spot, where half a dozen cocks were pitted against a like number from an adjoining village.

When placed in the cock-pit, the birds flew savagely at each other, and though Nature had provided them with formidable spurs, needle-pointed, razor-edged blades had been attached to

render them still more destructive. The cocks needed no encouragement, but fought desperately, digging the steel spurs into each other's bodies with extraordinary ferocity, and never ceased until the conquered bird, its flesh hanging in strips, rolled over on its side, dead, the conqueror, minus an eye, surviving but a short time.

On my way home from Rome through Italy, I saw very few birds—some redstarts flitting about ruined walls, some ravens, and, as the train stopped a few miles outside Milan, the signals being against it, I heard a willow-wren sing sweetly. In Switzerland there was positively no sign of bird-life, with one exception, and this was at a mountain railway station where we stopped for ten minutes, and I espied a large bird hovering in the air. It was a Lämergeyer, or Alpine vulture, a bird which, from constant persecution, is becoming scarce.

All kinds of stories have been written about the wonderful power of this raptorial, as to how it carries away children and lambs, and makes a meal of them in its eyrie. But although it might lift a small baby or a sheep just brought into the world, its comparatively weak claws unfit it for flying from the ground with any great weight. Its power lies in its huge wings—nine feet in expanse—its muscular body, and its strong

beak, and it can readily attack a chamois or a deer standing near a precipice, and drive it, by a sudden rush, over the hedge to the depths below.

Upon entering France I gave up looking for birds, France being a birdless country. From the eastern frontier to the Channel, the land has all but lost these natural protectors of vegetation from insect pests.

In England, as we speed northwards through the Midlands from London, or westward to Penzance, although the open country between towns and villages, except at the harvest-time, appears devoid of humanity—save for a stray shepherd or herdsman—there is no lack of birds. Every hedgerow contains them, pastures hold flocks of busy rooks and starlings, the coppices are alive with songsters, and, in game districts, pheasants and partridges enliven the scene. Flights of plovers, fieldfares, and wood-pigeons are common enough. As to sparrows, they swarm in numbers not conducive to the farmer's peace of mind, and every railway station has its own special family group of these much-abused birds, perfectly at home, hopping on the platform, or gathering the stray crumbs thrown out from some passing train on to the line.

Our neighbours across the Channel pursue and

persecute all the feathered tribe indiscriminately. Sportsmen shoot anything and everything, from eagles down to wrens, and glory in it, with what evil result in the shape of grub-destroyed crops it is difficult to estimate. So I had small expectation of meeting with anything interesting in Paris, but I was pleasantly mistaken.

It was the Exhibition year of 1878, the capital was full and hotel tariffs exorbitant, but at the headquarters of the British Commission in the Avenue de Suffren, at Passy, I had the luck to be hospitably received as a guest. Thus I was saved much trouble and expense as regards board and lodging, and as I had a "free pass" at all hours into the Exhibition, I considered myself very fortunate.

I soon found that there were almost as many birds—chiefly pigeons and sparrows—in Paris as in London, whether because of the dearth of cats I cannot say; but in the beautiful Luxembourg and other public gardens there were always men and children engaged in feeding their feathered friends with breadcrumbs. Some years had elapsed since the famous siege, when every animal, from the elephant to the rat, including the dog and cat, had been consumed, and so slowly had the cat been replaced that I saw hardly any of the tribe, and I was told, in tones of regret by many a

tradesman, formerly the possessor of a splendid tabby accustomed to recline with dignity on his counter, that they were temporarily almost extinct.

On the north side of the picturesque Bois de Boulogne, in the angle formed by the Boulevard Maillot and the Allée de Longchamps, is the Acclimatisation Garden, inaugurated by Napoleon III., and completely destroyed during the Franco-German war. It is not, and never has been, equal to many other Zoos in Europe, such as the Thiergartens at Frankfort, Hamburg, and Berlin, or the splendid collection at Antwerp, not to mention our own in London. But in 1878 it had several points of special interest.

In a rather poky little house was a collection of the most perfect African finches I had ever seen. A fine ostrich was harnessed to a miniature carriage, in which Parisian infants, to their great delight, were allowed to have a drive. The eagle-house was well-stocked with fine specimens, and healthy-looking for raptorials in confinement. The water-birds were particularly handsome, and were accommodated in a large open space, with plenty of clear, running water. In a châlet, entrance to which entailed a special fee, I was introduced to a pair of living Birds of Paradise, and have more or less been haunted by them ever since!

They—husband and wife—were sitting side by side on a perch, self-possessed, fearless, and in splendid condition—not a feather out of place or missing—looking fully aware of their own importance, the female in unassuming but comely attire without any flowing plumes, her consort literally glittering with loveliness, his throat a bright emerald green (whence the name, great emerald bird of Paradise), head and neck a velvety delicate yellow, his back yellow-brown with long, silky, orange-gold plumes waving behind.

These beautiful creatures had come from New Guinea. Though dead Birds of Paradise, carefully mounted, are most attractive objects in museums, the living bird must be seen to enable one to realise the depth of glory that the Almighty has seen fit to bestow upon some of His creatures. Truly, "through Nature up to Nature's God" is an easy step. And if there are things on earth so fair to look upon, what may not the new earth and the new heaven reveal to appreciative worshippers of beauty?

In the early morning the bird-skin collectors of New Guinea take their stations under the great spreading trees, whose tops are laden with the Paradise bird's favourite food. The men can hardly see the sky above them, so thick is the foliage, but they listen attentively. Presently

BIRD OF PARADISE.

they hear a curious, harsh note, a croak-like "wok-wok," then another, then several in rapid succession, and a flock of Paradise birds float down upon the topmost branches, their plumes flying behind and looking like golden meteors.

Peering through the gaps in the foliage, the hunters see a bird about the size of a crow, but looking larger because of its superabundant feathers. A blunt-headed arrow, or, in the case of Europeans, a shot from an air-gun, noiselessly brings it fluttering to the ground, and as the flock is not alarmed, bird after bird is captured to satisfy the caprice of fashion. Luckily, they are found only in remote and unhealthy districts, and thus have escaped extinction.

With modern facilities on board ship for storing, I see no reason why these fruit and insect-eaters cannot be easily conveyed to England and kept there as pets.[1] Mr. Wallace attempted to keep them confined in Borneo, but he failed, evidently because he did not go the right way to work. A Frenchman brought over the pair I saw at the Paris Exhibition. What became of them I know not, but I have a dim idea that they eventually died. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

[1] In October of this year (1904) a pair of, I believe, "King" birds of Paradise arrived safely at the Zoo, and were placed in the insect house.

CHAPTER XVI

MISCELLANEOUS BIRDS

ASTONISHING and misleading statements are sometimes made in connection with bird-life. The following appeared in *Nature Notes* some time ago, and struck me as bordering on fiction. The writer observes :—

"The more we study birds, the more they seem to baffle our science. Buzzards have been seen to ascend 1,000 feet perpendicularly in a minute or so, in a dead calm, without visible motion of their outstretched wings.

"A condor searches for his food 40,000 feet, that is between seven and eight miles above sea-level, in a rarified atmosphere and a degree of cold that would destroy mammalian life. He spies a dead animal cast upon the sea-shore, shuts his wings, and in a few minutes is feasting on the carcass in the sweltering heat of the tropics.

"A Virginian plover goes on his migratory flight,

ascends to regions probably far higher than the condor, where there is a rarified atmosphere that offers very little resistance to his rapid flight of between six and seven hundred miles an hour."

Now, the highest mountain in the Old World is 29,000 feet, and in the New—where alone condors are found—24,000; so that these large birds would have to soar almost as high again as the peak of Aconcagua, where from an elevation of eight miles they are supposed to be able to spy a dead animal (presumably a bullock) cast upon the sea-shore! Well, the swift has extraordinary powers of vision, at the distance of 400 feet being able to discern an object half an inch in diameter. On this scale the carcass recognised by the condor would require to be some 56 feet in length, instead of about 8 feet!

But the Virginian plover is supposed by the same writer to go one better than the condor, and not only to ascend much higher, but to fly at the speed of from six to seven hundred miles an hour!

The fastest bird in existence is, perhaps, the common swift, whose flight may be put down at from seventy to one hundred miles an hour, while it keeps on the wing fourteen out of the twenty-four hours.

Again, the record speed for homing pigeons

(from Newcastle to London) is 1,551 yards to the minute, or about fifty miles an hour. One splendid bird did the distance from the Shetland Islands to the Metropolis (six hundred miles) in 14½ hours, or about forty miles an hour—a wonderfully sustained feat.

Thus it is evident that six hundred miles an hour is impossible for any bird, it being as much as the swiftest can do to rival the 100-h.p. motor car with its ninety-five miles speed.

Respecting pigeons, there was witnessed in August, 1899, a strange and unusual sight at Dover, when an immense flight of German "homers" was started early in the morning *en route* for Düsseldorf, a distance of three hundred miles. Set free from sixty-three crates, they numbered nearly two thousand, and went up like a cloud. After circling about over the bay for some time, they gradually formed into little batches, as if consulting as to their course, and finally they headed for their destination; but the weather, being bad throughout the day, large numbers, baffled by the wind and rain, returned to the English shores. Several of them were captured, one being apparently the private property of the Emperor of Germany. It was of great strength and beauty, in the height of condition, and

evidently very valuable, being stamped with the Imperial Crown of Germany, and also with figures and letters, besides bearing an indiarubber band containing a message in cipher.

The bulk of these homing pigeons belonged to different societies round about the town of Düsseldorf, which is close to Cologne, on the Rhine, and they were flown under the auspices of the German War Office.

Wonderful the sagacity, memory, and powers of observation stored away in the little heads of these carrier-pigeons! But all birds possess the first qualification in a greater or less degree, though they have marked differences of character and disposition.

In April last, while the Cunard liner *Umbria* was in mid-Atlantic, 1,400 miles from England, a pigeon flew on board with a message from London—a record flight, indeed. And in July another intelligent homer, bearing a ring on his left leg (number 1,834) took a rest in the dining-room of the House of Commons, settling upon one of the tables where some members were having lunch. The bird had evidently come from afar, and was either so tame or so fatigued that it partook eagerly of food and drink from friendly and hospitable hands.

Take the robin redbreast, beloved by everybody, with his typical scarlet waistcoat, his red, dun, and olive-green plumage his full, gazelle-like eyes, his confident ways and alert bearing. Even the most mischievous urchin respects the robin's nest, or at least shrinks from the supposed ill-luck attending its spoliation. In Russia he is almost canonised, in Greece something of the same feeling prevails, while Brittany places him on the very pinnacle of affectionate regard.

Robin is always with us. He does not belong to the company of fine-weather songsters who cross the Channel and do their flitting before our corn is reaped. All the year round he seems anxious to be regarded as man's friend and neighbour. He is an intensely personal bird, and so readily adapts himself to the particular circumstances of his human chums that it is impossible to attribute his advances solely to the interests of "cupboard-love." No! Robin is endowed with a resistless bent towards man's companionship.

The stories told of this characteristic are remarkable, and there is an instance in which a robin formed so warm an attachment to two ladies that he would always accompany them in their country walks. When they went to live in another district

he went too, flying along by the side of the carriage. But his determination never to leave them was once put to a severe test, for it was necessary for them to cross the Channel. Nothing daunted, however, Robin perched upon the rigging of the boat, and he too crossed the Channel, making his presence known next morning by his customary friendly tap at the bedroom window.

Charles Waterton says that in the whole category of British birds, the robin is the only one which in its wild state can be considered familiar with man. Others are tamed by cold and hunger, but the robin will voluntarily alight upon one's table and pick up crumbs from one's plate. He relates that one of these birds not only hopped upon the spade whilst he was digging, but when he sat down alighted upon his foot!

Yet in one European country this sacred bird, along with other songsters, *is eaten!*

The most perfect characters have their weak points, and Robin's defect is decidedly combativeness. In the country each robin has his own haunt or beat, into which only his mate is allowed to enter, and if a flock of impudent sparrows descend, a single redbreast will try to put them to flight, or another from an adjoining beat will come to his aid for the moment; but, victory won

they will fall to fighting themselves. The whole summer is spent in combats, regardless of age or sex ; like game-cocks, they begin to spar directly they leave the nest. A pair thus intently engaged was once caught and placed in a big cage, where they renewed the fight more fiercely than ever. They were released, but the same evening were at it again tooth and nail until darkness closed the scene.

The smaller the bird the more pugilistic it often is. A gentleman became the owner of a pair of African singing-finches, and put them in a cage with waxbills, avadavats, and other little birds. They were beautiful songsters, but after ceasing their song they would pitch upon the smallest members of the community, catching hold of their legs or wings, the poor sufferers screaming piteously to be released.

The Africans were put into a breeding-cage, where their courtship—like that of true savages—was of the rough-and-tumble kind. After sweetly singing, they would fly at each other ; but one day eggs were seen in the nest, and, ultimately, young birds, who, like their parents, were most quarrelsome.

Nasty-feeder and sombre, the hooded-crow, with his harsh croak and black-and-grey livery,

is not popular; but his habits are of interest to bird-loving naturalists, and he is very sagacious. His geographical range is wide, for he seems to exist throughout Europe, in scattered colonies. In autumn large flocks visit England, coming probably from Russia, for "Hoody" always migrates from a land subject to rigorous winters as soon as he sees indications of hard times.

Few British birds are more voracious than the hooded-crow. He is for ever feeding; hardly anything comes amiss to him. His favourite food is cockles, and along our eastern coasts he may often be seen looking for these and other molluscs left by the ebbing tide. Dead rats and mice, slugs and worm, are prizes indeed worthy of careful search. He is fond of wild-fowl, and gunners say that he will follow them for hours in the hope of seizing some stricken bird before the sportsman can reach it; but he takes care to keep out of range. Though bold and ready to fight most of our raptorials, he sometimes meets with an ignominious death, falling a victim to some firmly-anchored mussel gaping open temptingly on the rocks, which mussel closing its shell with unusual quickness, holds him down by the beak until the tide comes up and covers them both.

Voracity is not confined to hooded-crows, and

when nestlings have to be fed the destructive nature of certain birds is considerably developed. The following well-authenticated fact bears upon the point:—

A sparrow-hawk was killed in the Midlands when feeding her young. Four days later, when the nest was examined, it was found that the little male bird, working alone for the family, had brought home forty-eight birds, viz.: six larks, nine swallows, one bullfinch, seven robins, six sparrows, six hedge-sparrows, nine blue-tits, three chaffinches, and one wren. The small widower evidently considered this wholesale slaughter an appropriate way of showing respect to the memory of his departed wife.

One other probably true story of the sagacity of birds comes from New York, showing that parrots do not necessarily talk mechanically, *i.e.*, without understanding the nature of their remarks. Broken-hearted at the death of his young mistress, a Brazilian parrot roamed about the house plaintively calling for "Louie," the girl's pet name. This he continued to do for many days after the funeral, searching in every nook and corner for her, until, grief-stricken, he left his comfortable home for ever, no doubt in the hope of finding her in some unknown place.

A famous London character in his day, Master Jack, of Brixton, lived at a tavern, where his special roosting and perching place was a bottle which stood on the bar. He was a born explorer and frequently travelled on the tops of omnibuses, and though several times lost, always returned to his owner. Brixton's jackdaw was exhibited at the Crystal Palace, where he was confined in a cage, which bore the announcement that a reserve of £100 was placed upon him. Master Jack obtained the third prize in his class, and was described by the judges as one of the finest jackdaws they had ever seen. Among many exploits of this remarkable bird was a day's journey with a cabman over the metropolis, and a couple of hours' detention in the library of the Brixton Police Court.

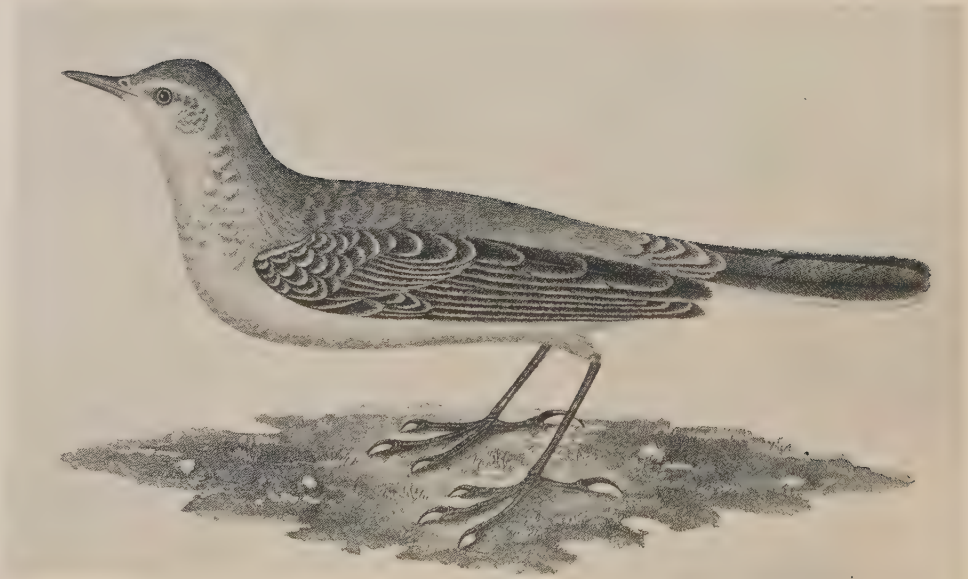
Could birds but communicate, what could they not tell us? Swallows, for instance, are most intelligent. A visitor in Egypt observed that every swallow had suddenly left the town in which he lodged, and spoke about it to a friend who had lived there some years. "Yes," said the latter, "and do you know what it means? We shall have cholera breaking out in less than a week. Twice I have seen this happen."

The man was right. The swallows, who practi-

cally live in the air, had, at a great height, scented the pestilential atmosphere, and therefore quitted the town. They are never to be found where yellow fever, the plague, or other epidemic diseases prevail.

Now for another true story of bird intelligence. A gentleman fishing on the Tweed noticed a yellow water-wagtail that kept timidly hovering near him, then disappearing altogether, evidently made uneasy by his presence. "Her nest must be close by," thought the gentleman, and creeping towards the bank, he saw her seated. As he looked a flash of reasoning-power struck the wagtail's brain. She flew off, and quickly returning, laid a large green leaf carefully over her eggs, completely hiding them. Satisfied that they were thus safely concealed from any casual eye, she slipped away to catch flies.

The following relates to a duck, but I think it is perhaps more an exemplification of remarkable vital powers than of intelligence. A person named Watt and a friend of his made a midnight raid on a poultry-yard at Southgate, and, seizing three fowls and one duck, twisted their necks and stowed away their lifeless bodies in the big pockets of their overcoats, and trudged triumphantly homewards. During this time, the duck, whose neck



YELLOW WAGTAIL.

had not been effectively twisted, recovered, but like Brer Rabbit, it "lay low and never said nuffin," until they arrived at a cross-road, where a constable was always stationed on point-duty (which circumstance the bird in its rambles had probably observed), when it cried out "Quack, quack" to the best of its ability.

"What's the matter?" asked the policeman. "Oh, it ain't nothin'," answered Watt, nervously. But the duck, realising help was at hand, repeated its "Quack, quack" louder than before. The constable immediately arrested Mr. Watt, while his confederate ran off as fast as he could. At the Quarter Sessions the former was sentenced to three years' penal servitude, and thus the duck not only saved its own life, but brought a notorious poultry-thief to well-merited justice.

At West Ham last year a cockerel became a detective in a similar manner. Just before midnight its owner was awakened by hearing it crow lustily. Being somewhat unusual, he opened his bedroom out of curiosity, and saw a man leaving the yard with a fowl under his arm. A policeman was summoned, and the fowl, bleeding from the neck, was found in the room of a lodger at a house adjoining the back-yard, where the lodger was discovered in bed, the mark of his crime on his hands.

When nest-building some birds do not apparently evince the caution and sagacity one would expect at so interesting a period in their lives; and I say apparently, for how can we tell with certainty what motive prompts them to select the places they do for rearing their young? Dining at the Wheatsheaf Hotel, Virginia Water, many years ago, in one of the rustic summer-houses, I noticed a wren fly out of a small hole in a door-post, a roughly hewn sapling. It made straight for the woods, and returned in two minutes with something in its beak. Then a second wren popped out; and the two continued to come and go for half an hour. Both happening to be absent together for a moment, I pushed my finger to the bottom of the aperture, and discovered there were eight mites nestling in a downy bed. To fill these eight mouths, the two parents had to work so hard all day that they had barely time to snatch a morsel of food for themselves. Few birds build in such a variety of localities as do wrens. But why should this most conspicuous position have been selected? For in fine weather the garden was always full of visitors, it being the "Wheatsheaf" custom to dine, when possible, in the open air. However, no one ever molested these birds, and it is even possible that the small

creatures were seldom seen emerging from the door-post.

All kinds of odd places are chosen for nidification by the feathered tribe—the masts of ships, and even the blocks of the running rigging ; letter-boxes, scarecrows, the under frame of railway trucks, farm waggons, and railway signal-boxes, where gongs are incessantly being operated. Last season a thrush's nest, containing four eggs, was found underneath the drawbar of a railway-carriage which travelled daily from Gaerwen to Amlweh, on the Anglesey line. The noise of the train did not disturb the bird, which was a most attentive sitter.

A little while ago some swallows took possession of a hut at one of the railway gate-houses at Billingborough, and occupied the nest they had built two years before in the loop of a piece of chain suspended from the roof. The whole arrangement formed a kind of miniature swing.

Some tomtits built a nest at the top of the hollow standard of a gas-lamp at East Grinstead a few months ago. The nest was securely fixed inside the tube, and immediately below the incandescent gas fixture.

Robins build anywhere. A nest was found on a bookshelf at Calverhall Vicarage, Whitchurch,

Salop, and another in a similar position in a study at Tunbridge Wells.

At Ryhall, between Essendine and Stamford, a number of young robins were reared in an old salmon-tin; and at a neighbouring railway station some birds made their home in a bell placed against a wall and in constant use.

At Stamford a couple of robins have for six years hatched out their young birds in an old watering-can.

The other day a robin built in an old-fashioned lantern, which hung up in a stable. It was taken away to be photographed; but the robin was in no wise disconcerted, and when it was brought back, proceeded to lay five eggs therein and to hatch them out.

Churches have a peculiar attraction for robins. In 1899 some robins built in the lower part of one of the organ pipes at St. Augustine's Church, Bournemouth. The nest was destroyed, but this did not deter the robins from again building and scattering moss and twigs about the chancel. The choir-boys were accused of causing this litter, and, upon their denying it, a watch was kept, and the real offenders were observed to enter the organ-pipe by the slot at the base. Whenever the sanctuary windows were open, in came the robins

and sometimes perched upon the altar during Divine service. How they were got rid of I never heard. But certainly, in these prosaic days, the organ could not be given up to the vagaries of mere birds, in the manner that the Emperor Charles of Spain, when besieging a Flemish town, abandoned his Imperial tent because a swallow had built a nest therein.

But I must end these stories about "birds I have known" with a short account of the bird I knew *best*, my pet linnet, Dick. (At one time I made great pets of half a dozen quails, which fattened on hemp seed to such an alarming extent that they had to be killed "to save their lives!" and my friends used to chaff me unmercifully because I afterwards devoured my little favourites.)

Dick was one of five linnets brought to me in their nest by a country lad, who exchanged them for the current coin of the realm known as one shilling. I did my best to rear them, but Dick, a fine, sturdy little cock, alone survived. As he had never known liberty, he completely reconciled himself, when grown up, to captivity.

Never a cage-bird had a happier time. He had an absurdly big cage, fresh sand every day, a large bath—slightly warmed in winter—of which he was inordinately fond; he was supplied with a variety

of proper food (hemp-seed only occasionally, as a reward), chickweed in its season, groundsel, plantain, and the like, while he had full liberty to fly about the house when it was safe to do so.

At three years old, Dick, although in confinement, assumed a beautiful red forehead, and his breast developed into a rich glossy scarlet. His song was pure and musical, though not very varied. As time went on he became as tame as bird can possibly be. He knew me and my voice perfectly well, and always raised his head-feathers by way of recognition when I approached; and liked me to stroke his back and head. I once had his photograph taken, managing to engage his attention by pronouncing his name, and he kept perfectly still for a few seconds.

Dick's great delight was to be placed in his cage on a lawn safe from cats, and to watch and talk to the wild birds around him. One day an inquisitive robin perched on the top of his cage, whereupon Dick agilely jumped up, and through the wires vigorously pecked Mr. Redbreast's legs, greatly to his astonishment. Dick was a great traveller, in the course of his life having covered fully two thousand miles by rail, and always with great complacence. In fact, he rather liked to be examined and admired by sympathetic strangers,

and enjoyed the noise and bustle of railway stations.

Dick lived to the ripe age of seven. He then became dull and weak; his feathers were constantly ruffled, and I suspect he knew what rheumatism was. Finally, he caught cold—how, I do not know, perhaps from too much "wrapping up." He rapidly grew worse, could neither eat, drink, or sleep properly, and on the evening of a lovely summer day he died in my hand.

I have never kept a pet of any kind since, and never shall.

FINIS.

INDEX

ADEN, Rock pigeons at, 206, 207
Albatrosses, Catching, 49–51, 55–57
„ Great Wandering, 51–54
„ Sooty, 49, 64
Amazonian lake, An, 122, 124
Australasian birds, 66–84
Australian bush, Nocturnal sounds in the, 75
„ eagles, 70
„ love-birds, 79
„ small birds, 80, 82
„ sparrows, 82
„ spur-winged plovers, 78, 79

BELL-BIRDS, 121, 122
Bird shooting in my youth, 38, 39
Birds alighting on ships at sea, 43, 44
Birds of my childhood, 1–18
„ paradise, 231, 232, 234 and *note*
„ *passage*, 204–216, 217–234
„ *my school-days*, 19–27, 28–39
„ the west coast of South America, 85–97
Black swans, 70
Boarding school of the past, 19–21
Boat-bills, 122, 126
Boatswain birds, 46, 47
Boobies, 44, 46
Brazilian birds, 112, 126
„ forest birds, 124–126
„ forests, 117–119
„ love-birds, 124
„ parrots, 121
„ pavâo (little heron), 116, 117

CALLAO, 85, 86
Cape pigeons, 60–62
„ „ Pie of, 61, 62
Cassowaries, 68
Childhood and the Zoo, 16, 17,
Childhood's favourite pets, 16, 17, 18
„ „ wild birds, 14–16
Chincha islands, 88–90
Choughs, 152
City birds in ancient times, 171, 172
Cockatoos, 71, 72
Cock-fighting, 227, 228
Colombo, 205, 206
Cormorants, 143, 145, 147
Cornish birds, 127–150, 152–170
„ songsters, 166, 168–170
Cornwall, Climate of, 128, 129
„ Rare bird visitants of, 129, 130
„ Severe winter in, 130

Cornwall (*continued*)—
,, Shooting wild ducks in, 130, 131
Cranes, 208, 209
Cruelty to birds, 225–227
Curlews, 150

Dick, 251–253
Divers, 136
,, Black-throated, 136
,, Great Northern, 136
,, Red-throated, 136, 147

Emus, 66–68
Extinct moa, 83, 84

Field-fares, 163 and *note*
Fig-eaters, 80, 81
Flamingoes, 213, 215, 216
,, Stalking, 215, 216
Flappers, 24, 25
Frigate-birds, 46

Gallinázas, 87, 88, 93, 94
,, Shooting, 93, 94
Gannets, 92, 93
Giant-crowned pigeons, 80
Golden eagles, 102, *note*
,, plovers, 163
Goosanders, 138
Grebes, 134
Guillemots, 141
Gull rock, 155, 157
Gulls, Various Cornish, 132

Hedge-sparrows, 13, 14
Helford river, 132, 134, 138
Homing pigeons, 237, 238
Hooded crows, 241, 242
Hoopoes, 209
House-martins, 166
Humming-birds, 113, 115, 116

Ibises, 213, 215
Iceland gulls, 131, 132
Italian birds, 221, 222–224

Jacanas, 125, 126
Jackdaws, 152, 190
Jack-snipes, 163

Kantara, 212
Kingfisher, Strange capture of, 36, 38
Kingfishers, 138, 139

Lämergeyers, 228
Landewednack, 157, 158
,, vicarage, 159, 160
Laughing jackasses, 73, 74, 75
Lima, 86, 87
Little-gulls, 149
Lizard, Artist's residence at the, 160–162
,, Snipe shooting at the, 162, 163
,, Head, 164, 165
London birds, 171–186, 187–203
,, Decoys in, 173–175
,, live bird markets, 34, 35
,, parks, Water fowl in, 175–177, 179
,, pigeons, 179–184
,, seagulls, 184–186
,, sparrows, 193–203
,, starlings, 192, 193
,, wild birds, 187–190, 192

Macaws, 120, 121
Magpie-larks, 80
Magpies, 165, 166
Malta, 216
Manacle rocks, 139, 141, 143
Master Jack of Brixton, 244
Mergansers, 138
Minahs, 82
Miscellaneous birds, 235–253
Missel-thrushes, 164
Mollyhawks, 47, 49
Moreporks, 74

Mother Carey's chickens (stormy-petrels), 33, 63
Mount Sinai, 209, 210

NATIVE companions, 70
New Zealand apteryx, 83
,, ,, keahs, 82, 83
Nidification of birds, 248–251

Oceanic birds, 40–54, 55–65
Ornithological misstatements, 235–237

PAMPAS sparrow-owls, 108, 110, 111
Parisian sparrows, 230
,, Zoo, 231
Parrakeets, 79
Parrots, 79, 80
Pelicans, 91, 92
Penguins, 86, 95, 97
Perilous jump, A, 159
Peruvian guano, 89, 90
Petrels in mid-ocean, Concourse of, 57–60
,, Giant, 63, 65
,, Great black, 64
,, Grey, 64
,, Stormy, 36, 63
Piping crows, 75–78
Port Said, 212
Puffins, 141
Pugilistic little birds, 241

QUAILS, 217–219, 221

RAVENS, 152, 154, 155, 190, 192
Razor-bills, 141
Red Sea, 207–210
Rheas, 102–104
Risky boating expeditions, 94, 95
River Plate birds, 98–111
,, eagles, 99, 101, 102
,, game, Plentifulness of, 104, 105
River Plate (*continued*)—
,, scenery, 98, 99
,, small birds, Tameness of, 99
,, spur-winged plovers, 108
,, wild ducks, 105
Robins, 169, 170 and *note*, 239–241
,, Affection of, 239, 240, 249–251
,, Combativeness of, 240, 241
Rome, 222, 224, 225

SAGACITY of birds, 243, 245, 247
Satin-birds, 72, 73
Scarcity of birds in France, 229, 230
Schoolboy audacity, 27
,, bird-nesting, 21, 22, 24, 26, 27
,, pets, 28–31
Screamers, 108
Seagulls, 40, 41, 43
Sea voyage, My first, 41–43
Shags, 143, 145, 147
Shore birds, 147
Sparrow-pudding, 32–34
Spoonbill, 159
Swallows and infection, 244, 245

TINAMOUS, 105–107
Toucans, 119, 120

UMBRELLA birds, 121

VORACITY of birds, 243

WHALE-BIRDS, 64
Wild-geese, 138
,, turkeys (Australian), 68, 70
Wrens, 147, 149, 248, 249

UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED, THE GRESHAM PRESS, WOKING AND LONDON.

BOOKSELLER. J. R. DAWES, STATIONER.
NDING
BRARY
N ATH.